

# Rising Above Slavery

Harriet Tubman escaped, then led others to freedom.

By Linda Trice, Ph.D.

A young Black woman walked carefully in the dark, hours before dawn. Once the sun came out, she would no longer be hidden, and the danger would increase. For now, she just had to be careful and use the night to her advantage.

She was running away from a man who held her as a slave in Maryland. The year was 1849, and slavery was still legal in many states. Like other Black people who were held as slaves, she was treated as property and forced to work for others. She had heard that she was to be sold. If that happened, she might be taken away from her family. Two of her sisters had been sold. No one knew where they were or if they were even alive!

So one night, when no one was watching, she ran away.

## Harriet Tubman's Story

The woman's name was Harriet Tubman. Today, she is remembered as a hero for leading others to freedom. Tubman was one of many enslaved people who never



After the American Civil War, Harriet Tubman (far left) continued to help others who were finally free from slavery.

learned how to read or write. Others wrote down much of her story, but parts have been lost. No one knows exactly how she escaped. One possibility is that it happened like this:

*Walking northeast, away from the Chesapeake Bay, Tubman searched for a stream, a creek, or any running water. Dogs called bloodhounds were used to sniff out the trails of runaways. The dogs might find her! She had heard that if she waded through running water, it would carry away her scent. She found a stream and stepped into it.*

*Tubman headed north, toward the states where slavery was against the law. During the day, she slept in the underbrush, resting, patient, hopeful that she was headed in the right direction. By night, she walked through fields, swamps, and dense forest. She knew how to find the North Star. Like many other runaways, she followed the*

**She escaped in 1849, when slavery was still legal in many states.**

*star to freedom. Along the way, people who were against slavery hid her and gave her shelter.*

Tubman finally reached the free state of Pennsylvania. She said: "When I found I had crossed that line, I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person. There was such a glory over everything. The sun came like gold through the trees, and over the fields, and I felt like I was in Heaven."

## Rescuing Her Family

She was free, but she missed her family. Risking her own safety, she sneaked back to Maryland and guided them to freedom. Slave catchers would have been paid a lot of money to capture her. The man she had escaped from would punish her to show others not to run away.

The dangers didn't stop her. Again and again, she went to Maryland and led a total of about 70 people to freedom. She told others how to escape, and about 60 of them succeeded.

Tubman worked for freedom in other ways too. By 1861, new laws that limited slavery led to the American Civil War between

many slaveholding states (the Confederacy) and mostly free states (the Union).

## After Slavery

After the war was over, slavery ended. Tubman's main concern was for sick and elderly Black people who had been freed from slavery but had no homes or food. She welcomed some into her home in Auburn, New York. Later, she bought a building and created the Harriet Tubman Home, which gave many more a place to live.

Tubman died in 1913 at the age of 91. Many streets, schools, and parks have been named in her honor. When Barack Obama was President, he made a proclamation to establish the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Monument. He said: "Harriet Tubman is an American hero." ❖



Harriet Tubman became a hero of the anti-slavery movement in the 1800s.

## Harriet Tubman: Civil War Spy

During the Civil War, Harriet Tubman worked for the Union army as a cook, a nurse, and a spy. As a spy, sometimes she disguised herself as a man. Other times she pretended to be an old woman, bent over and dressed in rags. In 1863, she became the first woman in American history to plan and carry out an armed attack. She and a Union colonel led a raid that freed more than 700 people from slavery.