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Imagine that you are hiding in the cramped, dark, bottom of a boat. You can’t make a sound. If you do, you’ll get caught and sent back. You can feel the boat going up and down with the waves. Each wave is carrying you away from the United States and closer to Canada.

This may have been what it was like for Joshua Glover. He was an escaped slave who fled to Canada so that he could live a free life. He wanted to be seen and respected as a person and not a piece of property. His life is an example of how slaves and abolitionists worked together to end slavery in the United States.
Early Life

Joshua Glover was born a slave in Missouri around 1824. We do not know much about Joshua’s family or early life because slaves were not treated as people. Their history was not always recorded.

Joshua would have had a hard life as a slave during the 1800s. Children were often taken away from their parents and sold to different masters. Kids began working in the fields when they were about eight years old. Masters sometimes beat their slaves with whips or shovels or killed them if they did something wrong.

A group of slaves outside their home in Alabama
Life at Prairie House Farm

Joshua was sold more than once during his life. He moved to a new home each time. On New Year’s Day in 1850, Joshua was sold again in St. Louis, Missouri. Historians think he was probably about 36 years old.

A man named Benammi Garland bought Joshua to work at his 300-acre Prairie House Farm. Garland had about five slaves. Joshua worked outside in the fields and took care of the animals. He was very strong and was a good leader, so he became the foreman.

Around May 15, 1852, Joshua ran away from Prairie House Farm. He crossed the Mississippi River and headed north. He did not know exactly where he was going. But he knew he should follow the Drinking Gourd to find freedom.


Slaves were sold at auction just like animals or other property.
Joshua left Missouri with only the clothes he was wearing. It was not an easy journey. He probably traveled at night so slave catchers would not find him. People along the Underground Railroad likely gave him food and shelter to help him on his journey. Joshua said he once went three days without food.

After traveling about 350 miles in six or seven weeks, Joshua arrived in Racine, Wisconsin—a free state. He got a job at the Sinclair and Rice Sawmill, and rented a small house from the mill owners. He was known as a hard worker and a responsible person.

The Drinking Gourd is a constellation; slaves followed it north to find freedom.
Garland did not know what had happened to his slave. He put an advertisement in the local newspaper offering two hundred dollars for Joshua’s return. He did not hear anything until almost two years later. A former slave named Nelson Turner told Garland that Joshua was living in Racine. The master began planning how to get his slave back.

Fugitive Slave Law of 1850

The United States Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 on September 18, 1850. It declared that all runaway slaves were supposed to be returned to their masters. Anyone found helping escaped slaves could be fined $1000 and put in prison for six months. Some nicknamed this law the “Bloodhound Law” because dogs were used to track down escaped slaves.
On March 10, 1854, Joshua was playing cards in his cabin with two friends. One of these friends was Nelson Turner. There was a knock at the door. Not knowing who it was, Joshua told his guests not to answer it. Turner did not listen to Joshua. He opened the door, and five men came rushing in. Garland led the group of men. Joshua tried to fight, but it was no use. The men beat him and took him to jail in Milwaukee. Turner was given $100 for helping to arrest Joshua.

People were offered rewards for returning slaves to their masters.
The jailor felt bad for Joshua, so he took care of his injuries. Like the jailor, many people in Wisconsin did not support slavery. They were part of the abolitionist movement.

The abolitionists did not think Joshua’s arrest was right. So, they organized a meeting that afternoon to protest. Hundreds of people showed up to listen to speeches against slavery.
Soon the crowd wanted to get Joshua out of jail. They broke down the jailhouse doors and walls. In fifteen minutes, Joshua was free! The crowd began to cheer, and Joshua shouted, “Glory, hallelujah!”

The abolitionists got Joshua out of Milwaukee. He traveled along the Underground Railroad back to Racine. Joshua snuck onto a boat in April 1854 and escaped to Canada. He settled in a small town called Etobicoke.
Joshua began life as a **freedman** in Canada. An old man named Thomas Montgomery hired Joshua to work on his farm. Thomas also rented him a house and 1½ acres for $2 per month. Never had Joshua imagined that he would be able to have his own land to farm.

Joshua enjoyed playing cards and going to community events such as the fair. Around 1861, Joshua married Ann, a white Irish **immigrant**. It was not uncommon in Canada for former slaves to marry white women.

On December 6, 1872, Ann got sick and died. Joshua was heartbroken. He fell in love again around 1881 and married a woman named Mary Ann. Joshua never had any children. He died around June 4, 1888.
Joshua Glover escaped slavery in Missouri and found freedom in Wisconsin. He was then forced to flee Wisconsin, and lived the rest of his life in Canada. His actions show how courage can help a person overcome hardship and create a better life.

Joshua’s story is part of the chain of events that led to the end of slavery in the U.S. The abolitionists who helped him escape continued to fight against slavery laws in Wisconsin and the rest of the country. They founded the Republican Party and supported Abraham Lincoln, who opposed slavery. Finally, the U.S. abolished slavery when it passed the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1865.
Glossary

abolitionist (n): . . . a person who wanted to end slavery;
abolish means to end or do away with

Drinking Gourd (n): seven of the brightest stars in the
c constellation Ursa Major; slaves followed
it north to find freedom

foreman (n): . . . . . . the leader of a group of workers

freedman (n): . . . . a person who has been freed from slavery

Fugitive Slave Law
of 1850 (n): . . . . a law that said all runaway slaves had to be
returned to their masters

immigrant (n): . . . . a person who comes to live in a new
country and stays there

Underground
Railroad (n): . . . . . a series of homes and businesses where
escaped slaves could stop while traveling
to freedom