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Imagine that you are a stowaway crouched low in the dark cargo hold of a boat. You are trying to stifle your breathing because you don’t want to be heard. If you are heard, you’ll get sent back. If you are sent back, you don’t know if you’ll survive. You can feel the waves gently carrying the boat up and down, up and down. With each motion you are moving closer to Canada…to freedom.

This may have been what it was like for Joshua Glover, a runaway slave, as he journeyed on a boat headed for Canada. Like many other slaves, he risked his life because he did not want to be property; he wanted to be respected as a person and allowed to live a free life.

Before this life-changing voyage, Joshua had managed to escape from slavery. He was beaten and put in jail, but still he persisted in his fight for freedom. His life is an example of how abolitionists and slaves rallied together to bring about the political transformation that ended slavery in the United States (U.S.).
EARLY LIFE

Joshua Glover was born a slave in Missouri around 1824. We do not know much about Joshua’s family or early life. Slaves’ histories were not often recorded because they were not regarded as people. A slave was considered equal to his master's horses or pets and seen as three-fifths of a person under the law.

As a slave during the 1800s, Joshua had a very hard life. Children as young as one year old were sometimes sold to different masters away from their parents. Kids usually began working in the fields when they were about eight years old. Masters often beat their slaves with whips and shovels if they disobeyed. Slaves who committed robbery, murder, or physically harassed a white person could be killed.
Like many other slaves, Joshua was sold more than once during his life. On New Year’s Day in 1850, Joshua stood shackled in a line on the St. Louis courthouse steps waiting to be sold. Historians estimate that he was probably about 36 years old. A slave trader lifted Joshua’s shirt so that people could see that he had not been whipped very much, showing that he was obedient.

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. Being a natural leader and hard worker, Joshua soon became the farm’s foreman.

Around May 15, 1852, Joshua escaped. He became a fugitive slave when he crossed the Mississippi River and headed north. He did not know exactly where he was going, but he knew that if he followed the Drinking Gourd, he might find freedom.
Joshua left with not much more than the clothes he was wearing. His journey would have been difficult. Escaped slaves often had to travel at night, either on foot or in a wagon. People along the **Underground Railroad** probably helped him, giving him food and shelter when they could. Joshua said he once went three days without food.

After traveling about 350 miles over six or seven weeks, Joshua arrived in Racine, Wisconsin—a free state. Joshua got a job at the Sinclair and Rice Sawmill, and probably made between fifty cents and one dollar per day. He rented a small shanty from the mill owners, and quickly gained a reputation for being a hard worker and responsible person in the local community.

The Drinking Gourd is a constellation; slaves followed it north to find freedom.
Joshua’s former owner, 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. Two years passed, and Garland did not hear anything about Joshua. Then a former slave named Nelson Turner told him that Joshua was living in Racine. The master began planning how he would 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, William Alby and Nelson Turner. There was a knock at the door, and not knowing who it was, Joshua told his guests not to answer it. However, Turner ignored Joshua. He unlatched the door, allowing five men with guns to storm into the house. Joshua’s former master led this group of men.

Alby fled. Joshua tried to fight the men, but it was no use. They beat and shackled him, and then put him in a wagon headed for jail in Milwaukee. Turner was paid $100 for helping capture Joshua.

People were offered rewards for returning slaves to their masters.
At the jailhouse, the guard empathized with Joshua. He took off Joshua’s shackles and cared for his wounds. This kind act was not uncommon in Wisconsin. Many people in the state did not support slavery and were active in the abolitionist movement.

News of Joshua’s capture quickly spread. Sherman Booth, a writer and abolitionist, learned of Joshua’s beating and jailing. He helped organize a public meeting to protest Joshua’s arrest. Hundreds of people showed up to listen to speeches condemning slavery.
The crowd soon grew restless and surrounded the jailhouse. They beat down the front door with a battering ram and broke through the walls. The crowd erupted in cheers as Joshua emerged free and declared, “Glory, hallelujah!”

Joshua was hurried out of Milwaukee. He traveled along the Underground Railroad back to Racine. In April 1854, Joshua snuck onto a boat headed toward Canada, traveling in the boat’s cold, dark cargo hold. He made it to Canada and settled in a small agriculture town called Etobicoke, near Toronto.

Wisconsin Historical Society. WHi-71932.

Joshua escaped to Canada on a steamboat that looked like this.
Joshua began a new life in Canada where he could live as a freedman. He met 64-year-old Thomas Montgomery who owned a large stone inn and a farm. Thomas hired the former slave to work on the farm, and he rented him a house and 1 1/2 acres for $2 per month. Never had Joshua imagined that he would be able to farm on land that he called his own.

From Thomas’ store records, we can tell that Joshua liked to eat bacon and pork, and he often baked his own bread. Joshua also enjoyed playing cards and going to community events like 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 died from an inflammation in her lungs. Joshua was heartbroken. He often kept to himself, mourning the loss of his wife. He found love again around 1881 when he married a woman named Mary Ann. Joshua never had any children. He died around June 4, 1888.
Joshua Glover used determination and courage to overcome challenges and hardships in his life. His story is an example of how slaves and abolitionists worked to end slavery.

His imprisonment set-off a firestorm of protests against slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. Not only did Wisconsin refuse to follow this law, but abolitionists in the state helped form the Republican Party. The first Republican Party meeting was held on March 20, 1854 in Ripon, Wisconsin. Abraham Lincoln, the first Republican president, wrote the Emancipation Proclamation, a speech that publicly declared that “all persons held as slaves” in any state will be “forever free.” The U.S. finally abolished slavery in 1865 when it passed the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution.
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 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
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