

Lesson 1: Keep the Spirit of a Leader

“It isn't until you come to a spiritual understanding of who you are, not necessarily a religious feeling, but deep down, the spirit within that you can begin to take control.” Oprah Winfrey, (American, television host, actress, producer, and philanthropist, 1954-)

Family Ties

I was born about 1820 or 1821, I ain't sure, because there were no papers to tell my birth date. My Mama said it was in the spring of the year, about March. We lived on the Eastern Shores of Maryland in Dorchester County. My name when I was born was Araminta Ross. People called me Minty for short. My daddy's name was Benjamin Ross, we called him Daddy Ben. My mama's name was Harriet Green. It was when I was about twenty-four years old that I changed my name to Harriet, like my mama. There were nine of us children. I was in the middle. Daddy Ben worked for the Baltimore shipyard as a lumberman. He taught me all kinds of things about the woods, where to hide, which berries were good to eat and which ones were for medicines. Mama worked in the big house as a cook.

My master hired me out to work away from my parents when I was a young child, about five or six years old. I worked long hours and I had to grow up fast. When I was away from my family, the people I worked for yelled at me or whipped me for not doing my work right, or for just being me.

It was hard on me not to be heartbroken and sad all the time. My master was always sending me to work for some mean folks. When I didn't work out for them, they sent me back home. Then after I got to feeling all better with my family, the master would send me to work for some folks meaner than the others were.

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For the time I was home, I felt like somebody worth being treated kindly, I was loved. Sleeping on Mama's bed made me feel warm and safe. Mama didn't really have a bed- just a quilt on the floor to sleep on, but I was always as close to her on the floor to sleep as I could be. I loved my family and their love is what I held onto. In my heart, I always had Mama's praying and cooking, Daddy's singing and stories, and my sister and brothers laughing and playing with me. When I was away from my folks and alone on a cold hard floor, just thinking about them helped me feel better. All I could do to comfort myself was to think of my family, sing, and pray to Jesus. The only joy in my life was my family. I asked Jesus to keep me near my family, always. Well, he brought me through those hard times. Those mean people could not break my spirit.

Lesson Learned: Hold on to pleasant thoughts.

Appreciate the family time.

Keep your faith, and don't let anyone take your self-esteem.

Harriet Tubman's childhood was not one that would be encouraging to a child. She suffered from physical and mental abuse. However, she had something to hold on to when there was no one around to protect her.

When there is nothing else to hold on to, there is love of family and faith in God. People can't allow a hard life to break their spirits. This strong spirit is part of one's personality. With many people, the spirit is within them, but their time to develop it just has not yet come. Hold on to your spirit; your time is coming.

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Discussion question:

1. When times are hard and your spirit is down, what do you have to hold on to?