

Lesson 27: Take Action When Needed

“And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.” John F. Kennedy (American, 35th President of the United States, 1917–1963)

Just Passing Through Troy, New York

Most folks think I only had to battle for freedom in the South or during the War. Well let me tell you about the day I had my own little war up here in the North.

I was on my way from Auburn to Boston to attend an Anti-Slavery meeting. I took the train, and I thought I would stop on the way to visit my cousin in Troy, New York. Before I could get out of the train station, I heard that the U.S. Commissioners were trying to send a man back into slavery. I wasn't about to stand still and let that happen.

The man's name was Charles Nalle. If you saw him, you would have seen that he was just as white as his half-brother who was trying to take him back to be his slave. I found out where they had him and I made my way there.

I put on a red bonnet, borrowed a cane, bent over and this old granny walked slowly past a dozen white men into the courtroom. I got inside where they were holding Nalle, and I got over to the window. I told all the colored folks to get all their friends in the center of town, to keep watch on me in the window, and when I gave the cue, they were to yell, “Fire!”

When the officers started out the door with Nalle, I turned to look down on the crowd from the window and the fire bells starting ringing. The crowd got bigger and excited. Just as they were coming down the stairs with Nalle, I grabbed hold to him around his neck and I was not going to let go. Nalle was handcuffed and the officers tried to get me off him. They clubbed me, clubbed him, and pulled one way on both of us while the

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crowd pulled the other way. It went on for what seemed like an hour. I lost my shoes; got my clothes torn to rags. Poor Nalle was beat about unconscious and his wrists were all bloody. But I held on. I said, “Drag us out, drag him to the river, and drown him! But don't let them have him!”

The tugged and pulled and knocked us to the ground. While we were down out of sight, I took off my bonnet and tied it on Nalle's head. From then on, the commissioner's men couldn't see his white head standing out in the crowd of black heads. Finally, my folks got control and dragged us to the ferry and they put him on it to get him out of town.

I knew that wasn't the end of it. The Commissioner had men waiting for Nalle on the other side of the river and they took him off the boat and to jail. Do you think I was finished? Oh no!

Hundreds of us got on the next ferry. I got the folks together on the other side and found where they took Nalle. We had to break down a door. Some men were shot. A man was hacked with an ax. I got some women to charge the door with me and we went in and pulled Nalle out. There was a wagon waiting to rush him out of town to safety. I guess you know that I didn't get to visit my cousin. I had to get out of that town.

When it comes to talking about fighting for your freedom, I surely know what that's all about. I know you have to keep fighting to hold on to your freedom and the freedom of other people too.

Lesson Learned: Advocate for others means to take actions and stand for what you believe.

Harriet Tubman saved this man from being returned to slavery. Before she took actions, there was only talk about the situation. She took the leadership role to bring the necessary action needed.

Advocating for others is hard to do. Sometimes it requires you to put yourself at some risk. If you step out and speak out for someone else, you are now taking on the same problem or looked at the same as they are. If you feel strongly about something that seems wrong, take some actions. Actions speak louder than words. You could be the one that makes a difference.

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Discussion questions:

1. What organization have you heard about that fits the definition of advocacy, (to support, campaign, sponsor, and believe in someone or something)?

2. Is there anything you would be willing to advocate for?