

ZWEDRU'S CHILDREN: PART THREE

A story of a West African family in Liberia, and a young girl's life as she is brought to Virginia.

By STEPHEN HANKS

Finally, the "Providence" entered the waters of the English colonies. On June 8th, 1725 it pulled into a port at Yorktown, Virginia with 161 enslaved human souls. Within days of its arrival, the ship's "cargo" was being advertised in the town paper, with an auction already scheduled to take place. As chance would have it, Akey and Bodebe, who also called himself Botswain, were again put together and sent with others to a "pen," where they would be kept until auction day.

When auction day arrived, people came from miles around: planters, business owners, lawyers, judges, politicians, clergymen, and slave traders. The selling would be fierce, each one trying to choose what they considered the "best pick of the lot." Akey and Botswain were "sold" together. The African men and women comprised many tribes: Ashanti, Yoruba, Gola, Bassa, Vai, Mandingo. With all their strength, dignity, and faith, they gathered themselves with all the courage they had left to try and comprehend where they were and why. As the auction appeared to die down and lose steam, the Africans who were still left were taken back to the pens. Soon they would be shipped to the next towns along the rivers until each and every last one of them were taken.

Akey and Botswain were transported into the northern neck of the colony to a tobacco plantation in Westmoreland County, owned by a man named Colonel George Eskridge. They were handed over to a black overseer, a Virginian-born slave named Jack King. There they were led away to the slave quarters to receive their first "breaking in" session. "They call's me Jack King, but I ain't no king 'round here... where ya'all from?... ya'all speak any English?... I don't know where ya'all from, but this here's tobacco leaf... now watch me, this is how you pick it... watch me now..."

Akey and Botswain watch in confusion, not understanding a word this old man has said to them. Soon ole' Jack King gets frustrated and tired. Frustrated of not being understood by these newcomers, and tired of having to do these "sessions" in the first place, tired of having to do this just so to not have to work as hard in the fields yet still receive his extra helpings of food that the other field hands didn't get. Off to the side another slave observes, an African named Quamino, an Ashanti from Ghana, who was brought here two years ago. Quamino stands and listens to the language of Akey and Botswain. Suddenly his eyes widen as he hears a word that sounds familiar to him. He approaches them and begins to speak. Unexpectedly, Akey and Botswain quickly become animated, speaking sounds in the Akan tongue with Quamino, a language many West Africans share together from different tribes. Sitting in the corner is Jack, with a big

smile on his face. "Looks like we goin' to have a celebration tonite, 'cause master Eskridge's comin' home tonite, and the whole family's getting ready for one big party," says Jack. Suddenly, they all hear footsteps coming from the main house. "Shhh," says Jack, "someone's coming." It was only one of the white indentured servants that worked there going over to the smoke house. The plantation was run by over sixty blacks and three white indentured servants.

That night, while guests from Westmoreland County continued to stream to the party inside the main house dancing and tipping their glasses to the kegs of cider brandy, the Africans celebrated their own homecoming. Back away from the main house and into the yards of the ten to twelve small house cabins dotted along the fields entered Akey and Botswain, escorted by Quamino, as they were introduced to each family in the cabins. Those who were on hand to greet their new extended family members were Mingo, Quamino's wife Taffy, William & Elizabeth, and "Congo" Judy. There also were George & Hannah, Rose, Tom, Jenny, and young Frank. Young Frank was about the same age as Akey, about one year older. He became fond of Akey from that day on, to meet this young beautiful black skinned girl. He did not know where she was from, or why she couldn't speak English, but he knew something terrible had robbed her smile. But as 'a true friend loveth all the time, and is a brother born when thou is in distress,' young Frank settled to ease Akey's bruised heart and spirit. Whether it was hoeing in the tobacco fields, picking in the apple orchards, or hanging meat in the smoke house, young Frank would work next to Akey. She still wouldn't smile, but each time he walked by her, their eyes would meet. The day Akey finally smiled was when Frank slipped and fell in the water while Botswain was trying to show him how to fish along the Potomac river. A kru Frank was not. And when Akey would catch some fish but Frank didn't, he wondered what had robbed Frank of his smile, if only for a moment. Yes, Botswain was happy that now his niece had found a friend.

Ten years later Colonel Eskridge died. Now his estate would be divided among his six children, including the Africans on it. After the funeral, the colonel's family gathered at the main house to welcome relatives and friends. The colonel's adopted daughter Mary and her husband Captain Augustine Washington soon arrived along with their three year old son George.

There was no work to be done in the fields on this day. The sixty men and women stayed close to their small cabins, while the friends and family of Colonel George Eskridge came to pay their respects. As people gathered in the parlour room, the boy George wandered outside to play. As Akey was

watering the horse, the young boy came over to her and said, "My grandfather died." Akey, who now had learned English, replied, "Yes, I know." But then the boy George asked, "Why did he die?" Akey thought for a moment then answered, "Evertone dies." But the young boy George was persistent, "Did your grandfather die?" This was the first time Akey had ever been asked such a ques-

tion. Then, picking up grains of sand from here. "Then, picking up grains of sand from here." Then, picking up grains of sand from here. "Then, picking up grains of sand from here." Then, picking up grains of sand from here.

Akey's family at that time was Bodebe, who also called himself Botswain, and his wife Jenny, George & Hannah, and Rose. Another



He did not know where she was from, or why she couldn't speak English, but he knew something terrible had robbed her

such a question since she came to this strange country, and here now she was being asked, from a three year child at that, "I don't know," answered Akey. "It has been a long time since I last saw him." "Where is he?" continued the boy, his curious mind now becoming engaged in this momentary conversation. At first Akey hesitated to answer, but upon the boy's insistence, she looked around, and not seeing anyone, bent down eye level with the boy and answered, pointing toward the visible Potomac river, "My grandfather lives out there, across the waters far away

George & Hannah, and Rose. Another family that lived next to them were Quamino & Taffy, William & Elizabeth, and Frank. One of Colonel Eskridge's sons, Dr. Robert Eskridge, placed this family of five on his property, which happened to be next door to his father's. Akey's family remained at the same place. Thus, both families were still able to live near each other. Dr. Eskridge later sold his property to a man named Jackson.

In 1744 Mrs. Elizabeth Eskridge died, and now her son Samuel would inherit the main house and the plantation. The family came to make the final arrangements. The boy George came, too, accompanying his mother Mary Washington. Akey, who was now 29, was also now married to Frank and had a daughter which they named Susan. Frank and Akey had been married six years now, just before Dr. Eskridge left for England after deeding the land to Mr. Jackson. As Akey was sitting and holding her baby daughter outside the smoke house, the boy George, who was now 12, came over to her, and both of them began to reminisce about the things that had occurred over the years during the occasions he had come to visit. Then Akey asked him, "do you remember when you were the size of my little Susan, and Mr. Eskridge died?" "Not really," said George, "I just remember many people coming and going, and the horse wagon slowly going down the road with everyone following behind it." But then George added, "I also remember seeing you over by the horses, and you were showing me the sand." Akey then asked him, "Do you know why I was showing you the sand? It was because you had asked me if my grandfather had died. You even asked me where was he." "What did you tell me?" George inquired. Akey went on, "I told you that I did not know if he was alive or not, but that he lived in a far away place across the ocean. I picked up the sand to explain to you that my grandfather grew pepper, and that people would come to his farm to buy this pepper, which the berries when crushed look like the sand." George then asked, his mind again becoming just as curious as it was nine years ago, "What was the name of this place?" Akey proudly told

him. "It was called Zwedru, near the river Cavella." She even went on to tell him that her grandfather, Sensobo, was a sailor and had traveled on ships, returning home with much wealth. These things were new to the ears of this boy. He did not know whether to believe these things or not. This would be the last time George would see Akey again.

Three years later, Samuel Eskridge died. That same year Frank and Akey had another daughter whom they named Jane. But sadly, families would now be separated. Samuel Eskridge's son Burditt took Frank, Akey, and their two daughters to South Carolina along with two other persons. Bodebe remained in Virginia where he later died, never to see his little niece again, the daughter of his brother Mennah and his wife Bina, of the village of Zwedru. Frank and Akey lived for a time, then they, too, died in South Carolina. Their daughter Jane married a young man named William and had five children: Ruth, Barbara, George, and William Burgess. And when Burditt Eskridge was killed during the time of the revolutionary war, his two sons Samuel and Ribhard divided William and Jane's descendants - Samuel taking some to Tennessee, and Richard taking the rest of the family to a plantation in Duck Hill, Mississippi. The overseer on the plantation was a man whose name was Marion Hanks.

As for George Washington, he stipulated that all African-Americans had been made slaves and living at his home, Mt. Vernon, be granted freedom upon his death. His nephew, Bushrod Washington, became the first president of the American Colonization Society, which led efforts in releasing thousands of African-Americans from slavery to Liberia, the country where the Kru still live.

After the war of the rebellion, some in my family changed their surnames. We left Mississippi in the great "Exodus of 1879" and went West to Osage City, Kansas where my great-grandparents, William and Rosetta Hanks, raised ten children. Many of their descendants are still alive and well down to this day.

THE END.

Dirty Little Secrets

By DR. CLAUD ANDERSON

Lincoln Didn't Free Slaves

Historical facts suggest President Lincoln was everything but "the great emancipator of black slaves." During the earlier years of the Civil War, President Lincoln publicly claimed he would not and could not free black slaves. He even acknowledged that the Civil War was not about black people, but about national unity.

Lincoln was not passive in his support of slavery even when Union commanders issued orders freeing slaves in captured Confederate territory. Lincoln blocked such orders at least twice. Lincoln's position was strengthened by the U.S. Congress in 1861, when it passed and referred to the states in an amendment to the Constitution that guaranteed that Congress could never abolish black slavery in America. Few northern politicians had any interest in freeing black slaves. They were concerned about breaking the wealth and political power base of the South.

Most politicians knew that Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation was a sham. Lincoln was President of the Union only. He could not and did not free black slaves. The Emancipation Proclamation spoke gloriously about freeing slaves in the deep South, over which the Union had no authority. Yet, it ignored blacks in the border states over which Lincoln did have authority. The attitude of Lincoln and his administration was succinctly put in Lincoln's letter of December 22, 1860, to Alexander Stephen, soon to become Vice-President of the Con-

federacy, "Do the people of the South really entertain fears that a Republican administration would, directly or indirectly, interfere with the slave, or with them, about the slaves? If they do, I wish to assure you, as once a friend, and still, I hope, not an enemy, that there is no more danger in this respect than it was in the days of Washington."

The Great Emancipators Sick Joke There is an old adage that whatever a man jokes about is what he truly feels in his heart. If there is any truth in this saying, it speaks poorly for President Abraham Lincoln. After Elijah Lovejoy, an anti-slavery editor had been killed by pro-slavery forces, Lincoln made a joke out of his death. In a speech in Worcester, Massachusetts, he said, "I have heard you have abolitionists here. We have a few in Illinois and we shot one the other day." The crowd roared with laughter. But, on the serious side, many of Lincoln's formal statements revealed he held no love for blacks, free or enslaved.

Reparations For Slaveholders?

Abraham Lincoln was growing increasingly sensitive to and fearful of, the divisive and explosive issue of slavery. Early in the first term of his presidency, Lincoln offered reparations to southern slaveholders. Lincoln devised a scheme to free the slaves gradually over a period of some 30 years. He would offer reparations to the southern slaveholders and pay them for their "losses" out of the national treasury. To carry out his plan, he needed the approval of Congress to pay southern slaveholders nearly a half billion dollars, only a

portion of their total \$7 billion investment. This was an unimaginable amount of money for that period in history.

Slavery Divided Families and the Nation

The Civil War is often referred to as the Great Dividing War. Although symbolically it was fought to preserve the Union, in reality it was fought to preserve slavery.

It was President Lincoln who said that a house divided against itself would not stand. He could have been speaking about his own household. The Civil War reached inside the White House and touched Lincoln's family, the First Family of this nation, and divided it as it divided the nation itself, along lines of Union versus Confederacy.

The division within the Lincoln household became so great that the United States Senate Committee on the Conduct of the War felt it had to deal with it as a national issue. The committee met to consider charges of treason against the President's wife, Mary Lincoln. Lincoln came to her rescue and read a brief statement denying that any member of his family had collaborated with the enemy.

Four of Lincoln's brothers-in-law wore Confederate uniforms. One of them, Lieutenant David P. Todd, was charged with brutality against Union soldiers held as prisoners of war in Richmond, Virginia. Mary Lincoln's two sisters were married to Confederate officers, while her brother, Dr. George Todd, was a volunteer Confederate surgeon who called Lincoln an "unhinged scoundrel."



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