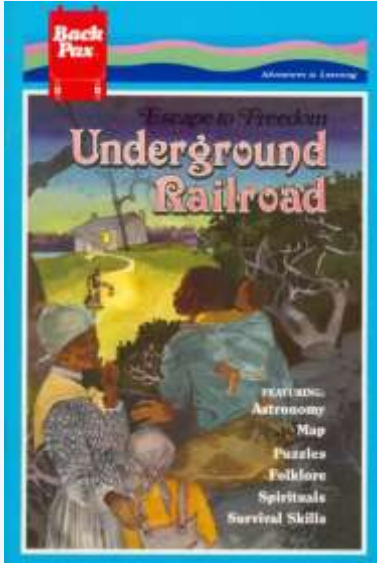


Excerpt, *STEAL AWAY: Escape to Freedom on the Underground Railroad* by Janus Adams



*Underground Railroad:
Escape to Freedom*

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Our family packed up the van and went off in search of adventure. We'd read stories of long-ago courage, daring, hope, determination; of men, women and children who had survived against the most awful odds.

On a lonely road in the Ohio chill, we were tired, hungry and cramped from riding too long. It was dismal outside, wet and foggy. Lights shone smoky in the distance. We were ready to complain. Then we drove a deep stretch of woods and the thought came that stopped us cold.

Many years before, lonely groups of travelers, running, walking, crawling, HOPING, for their very lives, had come this same way. They were cold, hungry, worn and wished nothing more than to be left alone. But slave-catchers drove them onward with dogs nipping and barking at their heels.

One woman found herself on the half-frozen Ohio River. She was jumping from ice patch to breaking ice patch — afraid she'd drown if she tried; terrified she'd be captured if she didn't. Trembling at the thought of her future and horror-struck by what had been her past, she continued on. She had nothing she could call her own — not herself; not even the value of her work. But she carried a priceless bundle on her back. And that weight, the life of her child, made her light as rain as she slipped along the checkered route. She would be free!

As she stepped forward, the ice continued to break behind her. It must have seemed like the ancient parting of the waters she'd heard promised in the Spirituals her people sang with such hope. For, as the ice parted underfoot it separated her from her captors; from her past life of slavery.

Even in desperate times, the slavery era, some people — like Eliza — dared to take their lives in their hands; and others — like one *stationmaster* in Ripley, Ohio — outstretched theirs to offer help. Not every escape was successful. But there had been moments when people, knowing what was right, did the right thing — no matter the threat or the danger.

*From the glossary, **UGRR CODES: The Secret Language of Escape**
Stationmasters—people who used their homes to shelter escapees

We thought of Eliza as we traveled on the road that night; and of the countless other heroes whose courage knew no bounds — or chains. Cold and worn, tired and hungry we had no complaint. We grew quiet, intense and very grateful. For we knew that although we could be where they'd been, travel the route they'd traveled; thanks to them, we would never in our lives see what they had seen.

The cold of the northern night lessened in this blanket of newfound warmth. The sky cleared to guide us through and the crisp chill opened a path to the stars. We let the light and the night lead us, for we knew we were on the right road: the winding trail to freedom. This was the path of the Underground Railroad.

*This little light of mine,
I'm gonna let it shine...
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine*

I sang for my daughters, reviving voices of old. Looking in the rear-view mirror, I could see them cuddled in the back seat, not asleep, just looking out at the stars.

*Everywhere I go
I'm gonna let it shine...
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.*

we sang, renewed, pressing on.

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