The repeated description of the last time a child saw the mother he or she was sold away from. The yearning to be able to read and to learn. The degradation of being stripped naked to be whipped or auctioned off. The quiet plea of a defeated man unable to remain silent while being whipped, “Have mercy.” The horrible image of a back scared by the lash. The torture of salt rubbed in wounds. The fear of being ripped apart by dogs tracking your scent as you run. Slavery was an evil institution purposefully built to trap the labor of many to make a very few rich and to benefit a growing nation. The guilt is widespread but it does not belong to all. Members of the abolition movement, which rose to national prominence in the 1830s and continued until the Civil War, understood that slavery was a national sin. Men and women, black and white, gave of their time and their money and their homes, and risked their own safety and the safety and peace of mind of their families to end slavery. Harriet Tubman was such an individual. Harriet Tubman is particularly admirable.

Harriet Tubman, born a slave in Virginia, continuously rebelled against her enslavement, defied the judgements of those who thought she was a weak, disabled woman, and found her own way to freedom, serving as a source of inspiration to others who shared her plight. When she was only seven years old, she ran away for the first time. Her theft of a lump of sugar had been discovered. She ran to avid the beating she knew would come and hid in a pigpen. Hungry because she could not successfully compete with the pigs for enough food, she returned home and accepted the beating. At the age of 15, she refused orders to help tie down a man who was to be flogged and blocked the path of the overseer as the man ran. She was hit by a two pound weight the overseer threw at the fleeing man and horribly injured, judged to be permanently disabled mentally and physically, but she fought her way back to strength. She was proud of being able, as a five foot tall woman, to drive oxen, plow, chop and haul wood, lift heavy barrels of produce, and run, despite a permanently disabled forehead and life-long battle with sleeping spells caused by the horrible blow to her head. She permanently sought her own freedom when she found out that a previous owner had freed her mother, but her mother had never been told. Ms. Tubman showed nobility and courage by knowing her own worth, by refusing to accept the judgment of others, by performing work that anyone would be proud of despite what others saw as physical weaknesses, by relying only on her own resources to reach freedom, had to have an inspiration to all other enslaved people who knew her and came to know of her exploits.

But Harriet Tubman did not relax in her own safety, instead she worked to bring others to freedom. Though unable to read, Harriet had great strategic skills, great physical and mental disciple, such as the ability to keep a secret, and was a natural leader, and all these traits allowed her to gain the trust of others, which she would need to obtain the necessary money and contacts to help others. She gathered people to free through trusted sources. She planned her routes ahead of time carefully. She would never enter the plantation of the runaways she helped, but arranged meeting places far off the grounds. She strategically chose to travel in the winter, when fewer people were about due to the cold, and would always begin a flight on a Saturday, knowing that news of the runaway could not be posted until Monday, as Sunday was a day of rest. She used her knowledge and love of the outdoors to tell time by the sun and the moon and make use of wild plants for food and cures. She carried a revolver and had no problem commanding those she was saving to move or die. She would move by any means necessary, forge passes, change genders, and double back to evade pursuit. She led hundreds of others to their freedom, including her own mother and father and other relative, though not her husband, who had married another woman after she ran away, not having enough faith in her to know she would return. No one could write such a plot in a piece of fiction as it would be said to be unbelievable! But slave owners believed it, proving so by offering at one time a combined $40,000 dollars for her capture. A sum like that offered by those evil slave holders she fought against states an indisputable concrete value for the work of one small woman, considered by most to be one of the least valuable human beings in the nation at the time. Leader such as abolitionists Frederick Douglas and John Brown, who she met in 1858, were strong supporters of hers, as were the leaders of the Women’s rights movement, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony.

Yet another admirable example of her admiral refusal to stop fighting was the fact that Harriet Tubman did not see the beginning of the Civil War as the end of her work, as many would have done, but as the beginning of a new stage in her work. To be continued . . .