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Who Frederic Douglass Met On His Journey To Freedom

Frederic Douglass's familial journey is complicated, and in the beginning, most of the relationships he establishes are fleeting, because Douglass was moved to several plantations. Douglass managed to meet friendly people of many kinds and mentions them in the novel *Narrative of the Life of Frederic Douglass, an American Slave*. This essay highlights some of the encounters Douglass has.

First, Douglass describes how the plantation works and how people around him survive the suffering. The first figure, apart from his estranged family, who is mentioned to care about Douglass is Daniel Lloyd. He is one of the masters and he takes Douglass to hunt birds with him. Daniel even protects Douglass from the older boys and splits cakes with him – he seems to be a brotherly figure to Douglass (Douglass, 23).

Daniel is not the only white boy that helps Douglass in some way. When Douglass moves to the city, he wants to learn how to read. His new mistress teaches him some letters, but she is stopped by her husband. Douglass needs to find help elsewhere and he does – he finds random boys in the street and gives them bread and in exchange, they teach him how to read (28-29). According to Douglass, these boys were poor and struggled, but when he compared his fate with theirs, they admitted that his life was harder. They were sympathetic to him. Douglass's bond with these boys was also brotherly – they helped each other and protected each other (Douglass protected them by not mentioning their names in his book).

At one point in the novel, Douglass gets punished by being sent to Mr. Covey's home. Covey is a stern and ruthless 'corrector' of slaves. Douglass meets Sandy Jenkins by the farm. Jenkins takes Douglass

to see his free wife and the couple advises Douglass on how to avoid harm. The chosen method is to carry a special root that is supposed to protect its wearer. Sandy remains in Douglass's life and they even plan to run away together, but Sandy does not participate in the end (43, 50). Sandy seems to be both a brotherly and paternal figure to Douglass; he gives Douglass advice, but they also seem to have a more casual bond than a father would with a son.

Towards the end of the novel, Douglass describes perhaps the most important paternal figure in his life. It is David Ruggles, a black abolitionist who helps Douglass when he becomes a free man in New York. Ruggles provided Douglass with shelter and helped him escape to a different place, because New York was not that safe. Ruggles also officiated the wedding of Douglass and a free black woman and then gave them money to help them escape (61). In the text, Douglass expresses great gratitude towards Ruggles.

Ruggles got to know various people on his journey to freedom and some of them were in his life rather shortly – but their impact was still important. For example, the boys who taught Douglass how to read enabled him to examine his situation through a different lens. Douglass made friends of both white and black people and in the end, he was able to find a relationship. His journey shows that with determination, an open mind and with resilience, it is possible to find friends in unlikely places. In dire circumstances, people rarely remain alone. Douglass did not have a family in the traditional sense and some of his bonds perhaps resembled it – for example the one with Ruggles. Douglass's journey perhaps unveils a phenomenon that many slaves went through – creating a family out of any people who could be trusted.

Works cited

Douglass, Frederic. "Narrative of the Life of Frederic Douglass, an American Slave", *Elf*, The Antislavery Literature Project, 2005, available from <<https://elf.phil.muni.cz/20-21/mod/resource/view.php?id=10773>>, accessed on 29 April 2021, 20:00.