

## Back Home

*Written and presented by Patrick Tisdale for the Mount Zion - Female Union Band Society Cemeteries Dr. Martin Luther King Day Celebration and National Register of Historic Places plaque dedication Jan. 2021*

(Setting - the Town of George, Potomac waterfront, and the old Methodist burial ground)

Don't try to make sense of this conversation. You can't - anymore than I can make sense of how I remember the details of my own death, and how I came back to my Akan homeland.

I died last week. Wednesday, January 10, 1838. The day is carved on the wood plank resting on my grave, in the burial ground on the hilltop at the edge of town. I believe my white given name is also on the plank - though I cannot really be sure, as I never learned to draw that name.

My white owner had rented me to the dockmaster down at the river. I am working with other Africans unloading a ship, and filling a wagon to take goods up the steep hill to the store house. My cold feet have no feeling, and slip as we work on the ice-covered cobble stone of the wharf.

I speak to myself, as I often do, as it best that black people do not talk out loud in the presence of the white boss. I ask, "Why couldn't I have been sold to a master in the warm South, or the islands I hear ship crews talk about?" I remind myself that the white church man told us life here in the river town was better for blacks than in the South. "You are nearly free here" he said.

I considered for a moment, that except on the sea voyage taking me from my Akan homeland to this country, I had not been beaten or hurt in the two growing seasons since I was sold to my owner who lives up the hill. All I know is I am very lonely. So being "nearly free" has little meaning to me. My very lonely is my homeland-everything I left behind.

My heart lonely for my village people (I did not yet have a village wife).

My nose lonely for the smell of my land, the sea air, the wet composting earth, sweet flowers and fruits. The smells of the village cooking fire. I miss the smell of my people - different than the smell of whites or the other Africans here.

My tongue lonely for the tastes of fire cooked fish, soup and drink

My eyes lonely for the colors of my land, birds, lizards, my people's clothes.

My ears lonely for the sound of rain season and streams in my forest, the animals and birds calling to each other - and the sounds of my people's tongue in conversation, and song.

Because I am having this talk with myself, I don't see the wheel of the overloaded wagon next to me shift before shattering. I do hear the wheel explode, see bright light, and find myself lying on the stone wharf looking at sky, and the heavy wagon resting on my chest. I realize I will very soon be dead.

I hear the white healing man tell my owner I am indeed dead. Hear my owner pay the church man for my burying ground near those of the other Africans. I hear the earth digger men say I was lucky to be put in the ground, given the many days of freeze. I hear the church man and my owner, standing at my burying ground, tell their god I was a good man; and ask their god to save me.

I feel the presence of my god, *Asase Ya*. I feel great joy, for she is guiding me Back Home - to be with the *Nsamanfo*; my ancestors. I feel great joy - for I have been very lonely for a long time.