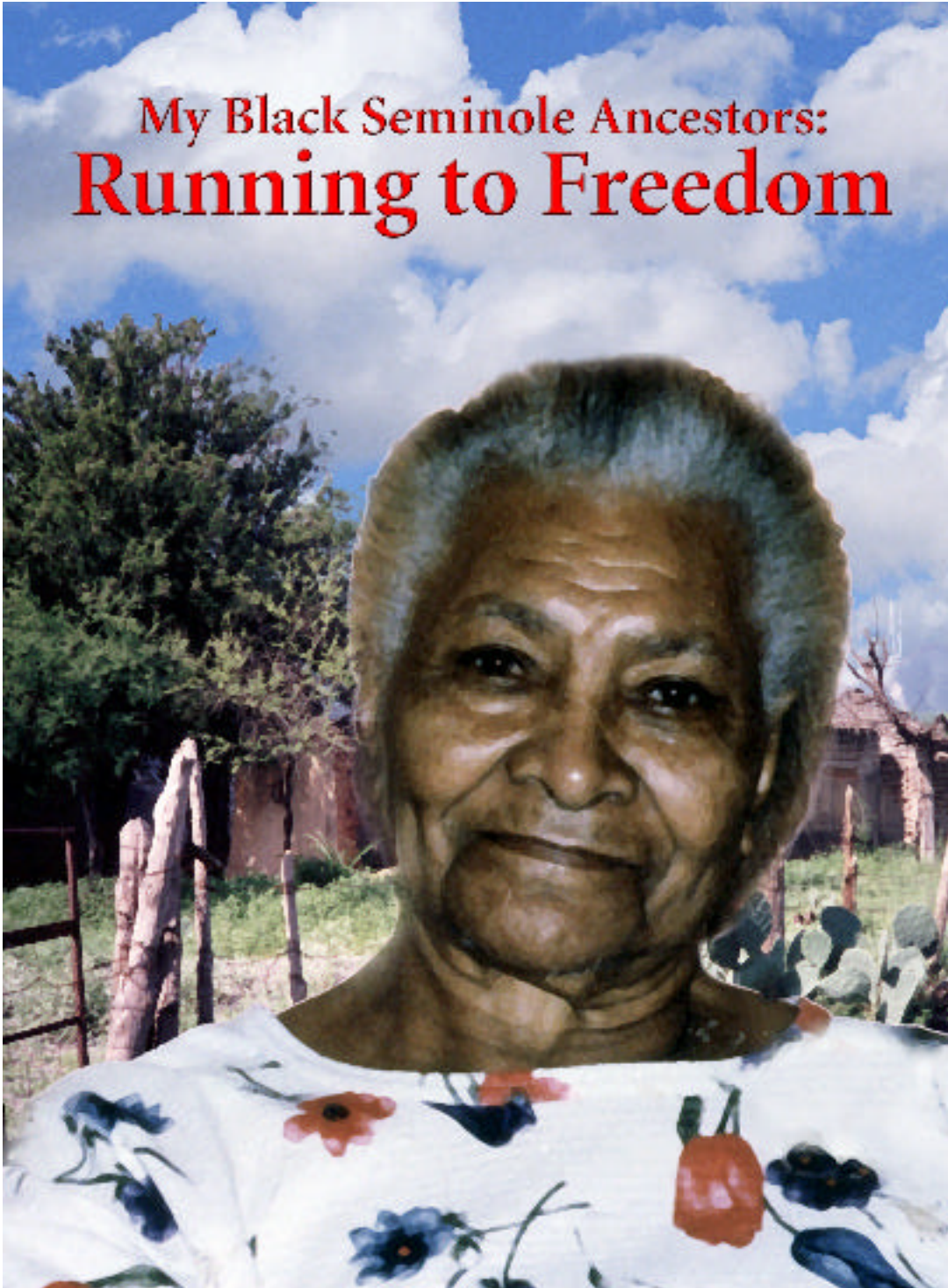


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**My Black Seminole Ancestors:
Running to Freedom**



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Alice

Alice Fay Lozano is visiting the ranch where she was born in the little town of Nacimiento in Coahuila,¹ Mexico. Her great-grandmother Rose lived with her family on this ranch in the foothills of the Sierra Madre². Rose lived to be ninety years old, and Alice remembered her very well...even that her favorite color was blue.

Sometimes on a clear night they would sit outside under the stars, and Rose would tell Alice stories about her people, the black Seminoles, and their trips to freedom. Alice was only about nine years old then and very curious about her family's history. Rose would hug Alice and tell her about the trip from Indian Territory³ through Texas to Mexico to escape slavery. In a similar manner, Rose's mother, Tena, had told her about another trip called the Trail of Tears, during which they traveled from Florida to Indian Territory. Rose was just a little girl of five on that trip and didn't remember much, but her mother, Tena, would cry and tell her about it. Their ancestors were black Seminoles⁴ and were running to freedom. Rose would wring her hands and tell Alice, "Oh, baby, if you went through what we went through, you would cry too." Alice tells Rose's story because she is very proud of the black Seminoles and wants us to know what they went through in their fight for freedom.

Rose's story begins in October of 1849 on the southern outskirts of Indian Territory, the chilly autumn wind pushing down from the north was tossing up grains of red soil. Sixteen-year-old Rose Payne stood on a little grassy hill trying to catch some rays of the morning sun. Short in height, she had copper-colored skin beneath wavy black hair that she tied up in a cotton scarf. In her hand Rose clasped a gray knapsack that held a few treasured possessions like her Sunday dress, all white with a lace collar, and a worn book wrapped in a piece of frayed red velvet. She had worn the dress when she was baptized as a Christian while living at Fort Gibson in Indian Territory. Like the other girls, she had tied her dress around her ankles when she went into the creek to be baptized, so the boys couldn't see her legs. The book was a present from the U.S. Army commander's wife, who was teaching Rose and some of the other girls to read and write.

Rose shielded her eyes against the dusty wind. Beside her, her brother, Bob, three years younger, tall and thin with skin darker than Rose's, stood with watchful gray-blue eyes. Rose, her family, and other black Seminoles were about to begin another trip in their long search for freedom from slavery.

Rose and Bob's ancestors were brought from the continent of Africa a long time ago to work as slaves on South Carolina and Georgia plantations.⁵ These slaves were called the Gullah⁶ people because they spoke a distinct Creole⁷ language and had their own unique traditions. In desperation many Gullah people ran away from the slave owners. Some made their way to Florida⁸ because it was owned by Spain and did not tolerate slavery. There they were sheltered from slave hunters by the Seminole Indians.

The blacks built homes, chose their own leaders, and had weapons to protect themselves. They were good farmers, and they provided the Seminole Indian chiefs with corn and other crops. They also married Seminole Indians and raised families. Some looked Indian, and some looked black. But they were all black Seminoles.

The black Seminoles and the Seminole Indians lived peacefully until the U.S. Government decided the Seminole's land was needed for new settlers to Florida. Many of the Seminole Indians and black Seminoles decided their only choice was to fight back—but they couldn't win. These battles were called the Indian, or Seminole, Wars. For the black Seminoles, it was again a question of freedom. The United States had taken over Florida from Spain, and now the blacks' former slave owners waited to reclaim them.

Rose's mother, Tena, and her father, Kelina, packed their mules to leave Indian Territory. Kelina tied Tena's well-worn wooden mortar and pestle⁹ on their old gray mule, along with animal traps, patched blankets, and the rifles and ammunition they had been hiding for the trip. The black Seminole women had parched corn and dried a lot of pumpkin before they left on the trip to Mexico. Rose had helped Tena cut and braid the long pumpkin strips that would get them through the winter trip.

Alice tells her story.

Why were the black Seminoles leaving Indian Territory? Rose's family had been living there for eleven years. They had not all been happy years. It wasn't the first time the black Seminoles had been forced to flee their

homeland. Remember that the black Seminoles had been on the Trail of Tears.¹⁰ They arrived in Indian Territory with the Seminole Indians. Some Indians, like the Cherokees and their black slaves,¹¹ traveled over different routes. Rose's people traveled by steamboat¹² from Tampa, Florida. They crossed the Gulf of Mexico up to New Orleans at the mouth of the Mississippi River. From there they were put on smaller boats to travel up the Arkansas River.¹³

Rose's mama, Tena, was born on a large cotton plantation on the north Georgia coast owned by a part-Cherokee Indian who had adopted the white men's ways. Tena didn't remember her mama very well because she had died in childbirth when Tena was four years old. Tena didn't know who her father was. The elders on the plantation told Tena that she inherited her mama's red hair. Tena was a popular name among the blacks. It was traditional to pass down their African ancestors' names.

Tena had worked in the big house taking care of the master's two young children. Years later Tena would talk to Rose about the plantation when she felt like remembering. She told Rose how she had missed the smell of orange trees in the garden and the salty sea breezes.

Tena had heard some of the women talk about slaves who had escaped to freedom. She wondered what it meant to be free. She really didn't think much about running away until the master took her first baby away to sell to another plantation owner. Tena had named the baby Rose. She was determined to not lose another baby that way. So when Tena heard that some of the slaves on the plantation were planning to run away, she decided to join them. She was just a young girl of seventeen and was very brave.

They left before dawn and traveled south along the banks of the Suwannee River.¹⁴ The ragged group headed to Florida, where they knew that Seminole Indians were giving other runaways shelter. Tena was really scared. They traveled through swamps with thick clumps of mangroves¹⁵ and dense palmettos and brush that scratched her arms and face. They had to eat wild berries and roots. Once they were almost captured by slave hunters on horseback. They breathed a sigh of relief when they left the swamps behind and arrived on the broad Alachua Plains¹⁶ of Florida. Tena and the other runaways knew that the great Seminole chief King Payne¹⁷ lived there with his people and would give them refuge.

Tena joined other runaways living under the protection of King Payne. She took his name for her last name, calling herself Tena Payne. He was a kind man, and she lived under his protection for five years. After King Payne died, Tena was taken in by his nephew Billy Bowlegs.¹⁸ She continued to live in the village and was known for her independent ways. Kelina came to visit the camp one day, and they met. After that he came to visit often, and soon after that they jumped over the broom.¹⁹ Then they had a child. Tena named her Rose in honor of her first baby who had been sold away. She was my great-grandmama. It was a Gullah tradition to use the names of those who had passed away. Rose was only five years old when they left on the Trail of Tears.

Alice as narrator

My great-grandmama Rose told me about her papa, Kelina. She recalled that he would speak in a soft strange voice to her to soothe her fears. She remembered the faint dark marks on his skin like little bird tracks that gathered moisture when he was nervous. Rose always wondered about those marks but was afraid to ask her papa. Kelina had told her that none of the other Indians wanted the black Seminoles in Indian Territory, but he assured her that Wild Cat²⁰ and John Horse would take care of them.

Kelina was tall, strong, and darker than Rose's mama, Tena. Sometimes he talked in a language that Rose did not understand. He once told her that it was how his people talked.

Kelina would get sad and tell Rose that he would never see his mother and father again. He said that he came from another place across the sea where blacks were free, where you could go down a creek and not stop until you came to the blue sea. Kelina was only a child when he had been kidnapped and put on a boat for the Americas.

He told Rose that his mama had named him after his grandfather Ke'lina, who was a well-known healer. His father and his father before him had carried that name. Kelina shared with Rose his memories about the pungent smell of rain hitting the dry, mud-walled houses of his village in Africa and the smell of dusty rice on his mama's winnowing²¹ basket.

As a slave Kelina had worked hard in the rice fields with his brothers Plenty, Hardy, and Cuffee on a large plantation in South Carolina close to the sea. His brothers still carried their “basket”²² names of African or Gullah origin on the plantation. His master was an idle fellow who had inherited his fortune and traveled about for much of the year. He had left Kelina and his brothers pretty much alone, for they knew how to choose the young green rice plants and build the irrigation ditches and dams²³ necessary to rice growing.

Life was not as bad for Kelina as for other slaves on the plantation. He was strong in spirit and body. But considering the uncertainty of the old planter's fortunes, Kelina worried that he and his brothers would eventually be sold or loaned out to another master. So he hid a little cypress canoe in the gnarled mangroves by the sea and hoarded some food over time. One day the brothers met secretly and set off down the coast, never looking back.

Kelina and his brothers headed toward central Florida to the village of Pilalikaha where they knew the great Seminole Chief Micanopy lived.²⁴ They hoped that he would give them refuge. Pilalikaha lay south of Alachua, where Tena had taken refuge with King Payne. Kelina and his brothers were welcomed into Chief Micanopy's camp. Kelina later fought with Micanopy's Indian warriors in the Second Indian War²⁵ against the United States Army. Kelina was a brave warrior and the old chief treated him like as a trusted advisor and a son. Kelina also became good friends with John Horse,²⁶ who served as Micanopy's interpreter. Later, after their defeat in the war, the two old friends would find themselves together on the Trail of Tears during their forced removal to Indian Territory.

The black Seminoles were happy minding their own business. They had livestock and nice farms. President Andrew Jackson, though, was determined to take their land for new settlers. He had already fought against the Indians and blacks in other wars. They fought back over the years. The black Seminoles were blamed for influencing the Seminole Indians to fight. Finally President Jackson passed a law that said that all blacks and Indians had to leave Florida.

Many of the black Seminoles, like Kelina, Tena, and their children Rose and Bob, gathered to surrender to the U.S. Army in Jupiter, Florida. General Jesup²⁷ had promised them that if, they surrendered, they would be free when they got to Indian Territory. They believed him. They were tired of

fighting and knew they had no chance against the powerful U.S. Army. The black Seminoles walked to Tampa Bay, Florida,²⁸ where they were put on big boats to travel to New Orleans. The soldiers were so worried the black Seminoles would run and cause trouble, they shoved them onto the boats. Some of the people had never seen the ocean. The elders trembled because they remembered crossing the ocean in chains from Africa. They were so confused. It was hard on the babies, and some died.

On September 6, 1838, Rose's group finally reached their destination, Fort Gibson in Indian Territory. They had walked part of the way because the Arkansas River was too low for the boats to pass. Women and children rode in carts pulled by mules. The men had to walk. They finally made it and settled in a little place called Wewoka that John Horse found. The black Seminoles thought that they had finally found a home and freedom in Indian Territory. But many of them had been slaves, and it was still possible for their former owners to track them down and lay claim to them.

Rose overheard Kelina and Tena talking deep into the night about new kidnappings by slave hunters in Indian Territory. Her mama told Kelina that she was almost thirty years old, and she was tired of waiting to be claimed by somebody. She cried and told him that she wanted Rose and Bob to grow up free. They knew that Creek Indians had already claimed some former slaves. Some slaves of Cherokee and Choctaw Indians had fled for the Red River a few years earlier to escape to Mexico, but they had been killed or captured and brought back to their owners. The runaways were all in bad shape.

Rose was a teenager, but she didn't have time to date or have fun. She had to help her parents. She thought a lot about slavery. She could not imagine being owned by somebody and passed around and borrowed like a good plow or a horse. Rose knew that slave owners lent out their slaves to other plantations or passed them from seller to seller. Some people even formed companies to buy up claims to slaves so they could make money.

Rose's parents were always warning her and Bob to be careful. They explained that slave hunters weren't just white people, but other Indians and part-Indians too. Even some mixed-blood Seminoles turned on their own people for the money of the white men.

So after many late-night discussions, Tena and Kelina decided to take Rose and Bob and leave their farm near Wewoka and go to Fort Gibson. The U.S. Army Commander had considered their plight and had offered to let them camp at Fort Gibson for safety. Rose recalled the crude log buildings on the high, broad terrace above the wide river and soldiers in faded blue uniforms living in rows of dingy tents.

Tena missed their neat log cabin and her fields with pumpkin vines and straight rows of tasseled corn. She cried about leaving the loom on which she had woven brightly colored cloth. She had even dyed the yarn. Tena knew every kind of root, bark, leaf, and berry that made whatever color she wanted. Rose remembered the beautiful baskets her mama had woven from sweet grass.

Things kept getting worse for the black Seminoles. That is why they finally decided to make a break for Mexico, where slavery was outlawed. Many runaway blacks (and black Indians) had already settled in Mexico. It was a well-known fact among slaves that they simply had to head south to freedom. As an old woman in Mexico many years later, Rose told me, "Some of the members of the group were still arguing about whether to leave or not. Elders were pleading with their children not to go. Chief John Horse, our leader, as usual spoke to all of us as if he were our father. He told us that we all had to be together in this—not fighting each other. Before we left Indian Territory, Chief John Horse drew us together and warned us. This is what he said.

“ ‘The Mexican government does not allow slavery, and they want us to come there and live. They will make us citizens and give us rations and land. Wild Cat and I have been there to look it over. It will be hard going through Texas, for you know they have harsh laws for slaves and are looking for runaways. Texas is a rough country of vast prairies and hills. There are Indians. Some will help us, and others will hunt us down. We will have to prepare well because there will be little food. We will stock up on our ammunition and hide our rifles until it is time to go. We will all be ready!’”

On that November day in 1849, they were ready to leave Indian Territory. John Horse rode his white horse, American, in the middle of the group. The silver crescent jewelry on his leather waistcoat was shining in the sun. His breeches were blue. On his head he wore a yellow turban and eagle feather

in the Seminole Indian style. John Horse tried to hurry the people along. He shouted, "Chief Wild Cat and his warriors are ready to go with us. We must leave now for Mexico quickly, before the slave hunters find our trail!"

His usually kind eyes were hard. Seminole and Creek Indians had tried to ambush and kill John Horse in Indian Territory. Unfriendly Creek Indians had even stolen his livestock. Juana, his older sister, stood beside him that day. Her complexion was lighter than John Horse's. She had long, black, wavy hair and wore gold earrings. It was said that she was part-Cherokee Indian. Juana was very sad as they set out for Mexico for she was leaving behind two of her children, who had been kidnapped in Indian Territory. John Horse had tried unsuccessfully to get them back, but they had been sold downriver by a slaver and had vanished.

Rose's dark eyes would shine when she remembered Wild Cat. She would smile and say that he was a very handsome man. He rode a big black horse with a white muzzle. On the day they left Indian Territory, he was followed by his retinue of warriors, wives, and children. He wore a bright red turban topped with four eagle feathers. His shirt was beaded, and his leather leggings were fringed and knotted. On his chest was the bright silver crescent jewelry favored by the Seminole Indian warriors. Wild Cat was a bold chief. All the black Seminoles believed that Wild Cat could save them because he was feared by both Indians and white men. The U.S. Army had first sent Wild Cat to Texas four years earlier to help with peace negotiations with the Comanches. He knew the country well, and he used that knowledge to his advantage. Wild Cat was politically ambitious and wanted to set up his own colony in Mexico with the help of John Horse. After Texas became part of the United States in 1845, Wild Cat had returned to meet with the Waco²⁹ (Hueco) Indians living in central Texas. He talked these Indians into letting the Seminole Indians and black Seminoles pass peacefully on their journey to Mexico. He also negotiated with other Indians³⁰ in Texas to make certain that the two groups could pass through with no trouble.

There were about two hundred people leaving Indian Territory on that autumn day. Some were walking, and others rode mules or horses. Among the group were other Indians and slaves fleeing their Indian owners. Rose wondered if her people would make it to the Rio Grande. The blacks called it the Freedom River. Rose remembered the Bible story she had heard from the commander's wife at Fort Gibson about the sea parting and the Israelites

walking to the Promised Land. There had been no Promised Land for her people in Indian Territory.

Rose told me that first they crossed the Red River,³¹ a tributary of the great Mississippi, on which they had traveled to Indian Territory eleven years before. It was December before the two groups spread out onto the rolling hills of north Texas. Seminole Indians and black Seminoles had separated into two parties as they moved south. The groups encountered trouble soon after they crossed into Texas. Angry Creek Indian slave owners were in hot pursuit of them. Wild Cat and John Horse's warriors had to fight them off.

They had pushed further south into Texas by the end of December. The cold winds followed them from the north. Rose grew a little taller, bearing the full figure of a woman, a blanket stretched across her frail shoulders. By now she had patched her homespun dress and cut out the ends of her boots and stuffed them with grass. Bob stayed with Kelina and the other warriors.

The first Texas Indians Rose saw on the trip were the Wacos. The men must have been out hunting because the women and children were alone in the village as the group passed by silently. Wild Cat and John Horse had met with the Waco chiefs and had learned they were peaceful. The women were weaving grass into one of their large circular houses. Rose smelled the pungent odor of tobacco. Older women and barefoot children were tending rows of buffalo meat strips drying in the sun on poles. Two women brought them two big bags of parched corn as they passed by the village.

That winter the weather was fierce. Sometimes it seemed like an impossible task to go on. When they stopped to rest, Tena and Rose took the corn the Waco women had given them and ground it in the old wooden mortar with the big pestle. They were very tired because they had had to cut the wood for the fire too. The men were on watch. Then Tena boiled the corn to make sofkee³² in her big brass pot, just like her people and the Indians had done in Florida and Indian Territory. Sofkee, a corn gruel or soup, was their lifeblood. In Florida and Indian Territory, it was always cooking on the fire, and people would eat it whenever they got hungry. Tena liked to add a little wild turkey or venison or a little pumpkin or squash—whatever she had. That day Rose added some wild persimmons and berries she had collected to the cooking pot.

They were worried for they all knew that soon the corn would be gone. John Horse told them that they needed to plant a crop of corn and make winter quarters. It was too cold on the prairie. Wild Cat and John Horse decided that the groups would camp on Cow Bayou off of the Brazos River. Their camp was located near the present-day town of Waco in central Texas. They were getting settled in, when one day Kelina and some of the other men come rushing into camp and yelled, “We have to leave right now because there is a band of slave hunters in the area.”

The women gathered the children quickly. The tired group continued to travel southwest, hiding in the woody areas along the riverbanks. They were losing hope, and there was no food. The corn and pumpkin they brought with them were gone, and so they prayed hard. In this they were all together.

It was the end of March now, and they had been traveling for almost five months. Rose saw the first butterflies one morning. They were orange and black and lingered like leaves on the trees. Then suddenly they would take off in groups, fluttering like colorful snowflakes in the blue sky. The children loved to chase them. Kelina told Rose that the butterflies were migrating north, and that was a sign of spring. That night when Rose lay down to sleep, for the first time she smelled the pungent odor of the soil waiting to give birth. As the days passed, their trip became easier. The scenery changed to thick canopies of trees and rolling hills of green prairie. Large red ant mounds appeared on the prairie after the strong spring rains. The women warned the children not to knock them down because that would show the slave hunters their route.

Wild pecan trees provided them with food. As the group traveled close to the banks of the river, Rose noticed the pink-blossomed trees and cascades of brightly colored wildflowers sprouting out of the crevasses of the rocks.

They all had to work hard. Tena taught Rose how to hide on the secluded banks of the creek and catch blue catfish with her bare hands. The women would catch possums, birds, and squirrels and gather wild plants while the men were out scouting or hunting. When the men killed a deer or javelina,³³ they would dig a shallow hole, and the women would place the meat in the ground, put leaves over it, and bury it with stones or hot dirt the way the Indians did to cook it. They all shared the food.

The older women carried their recipes for foods from Florida, Indian Territory, and Africa as part of their tradition. They passed down the good medicines to cure the sicknesses such as influenza and pneumonia. Rose learned from Tena how to calm the pains of a difficult childbirth and soothe a sprained ankle.

They made teas to heal the soul and mind because that was important to their survival. The younger women and children were in charge of finding honey and wild grapes, berries, and summer plums in the thickets guarding the edges of the plains.

The group reached the Llano River about a hundred miles above Austin, and it became their landmark as they traveled west. It was April now. Rose had become more confident that they would make it to Mexico. By this time Kickapoos³⁴ and other Indians encouraged by Wild Cat had joined them on their journey. Sometimes the men made a more visible trail so the enemy would not detect the women and children traveling in the other group. One time they happened on a herd of cattle and drove them over both trails to confuse the slave hunting party.

Buffalo herds on the prairie surprised the travelers at times. Shaggy with drooping heads, they would stampede to the north. The dust would be thick. The buffaloes left trails of deep furrows that were hard for the mules and horses to navigate. Rose developed a fondness for one old ragged bull with a long beard, which was posted as a guard by the herd. She named him Sampson. John Horse told the group that the buffalos were their friends because the animals' tracks would hide their own trail from the slavers. Some of the men would take great pride when they managed to isolate and shoot one of the great beasts and provide a sizable amount of meat for the group.

As they traveled further south, John Horse located a valley in the midst of some hills near a small German settlement called Fredericksburg. By this time it was the end of May, and they had been traveling for almost seven months. John Horse told his people that the people there were friendly to blacks. He wasn't so worried about slavers. There was good forage for the mules and horses. The soil was black and fertile, and they could plant an early corn crop. Most important, there was a high ridge from which the men could see the prairie below to the north.

While they waited near Fredericksburg for the corn crop to ripen, Wild Cat and John Horse visited a local farmer in May and purchased several bushels of corn. Their people were desperate from hunger. The two chiefs also visited Fort Grogran near Burnet, where the U.S. Army gave them some beef and other food supplies.

By now, other runaway blacks and Indians had joined the black Seminole group. Young men for the most part, they would come running into the camp out of breath. They told terrifying stories about being hunted by slavers. Like others, Rose often worried that the slavers were close by. She was glad that Wild Cat and his warriors were along to protect their group.

All was going well, until one Friday afternoon in late June. Rose and Tena were preparing to help the other women harvest the crop of corn they had planted, now barely ripe. John Horse rode into camp on his horse, American, yelling that slavers were on their way. He told them to split up into two parties. "I want the women and children in one group. Kelina, you and a few other men stay with them. The rest of you men follow after them ready to fight." The refugees started for the Rio Grande. Rose felt really scared. Weeks passed, and the sun beat down on them as they hurried for the border. The land was flat, and they were afraid because they had hardly any place to hide.

They passed through Eagle Pass across from the Mexican town of Piedras Negras. Then the group reached the Rio Grande just as the sun set in the pink and orange sky. It was sometime in the summer of 1850, and the muddy river was high. The currents were swift. Because many could not swim, the men began building little rafts out of logs tied together to pole across. The men began ferrying the women and children across as fast as they could. Mothers tried to muffle their children's cries. It took all night to get everyone in the group across the river. Tena and Rose rode on a raft with Juana and her two children.

Just at daybreak, as the last raft was crossing, the slave hunters appeared on the other side of the river. But the group had escaped in the nick of time, and the leaders rode ahead to see what the Mexican government officials would say. Tena, Kelina, Rose, and Bob huddled with all the others in the tall canes on the edge of the river. A few days later, John Horse came riding back. He and Wild Cat had held a meeting with Mexican authorities. John Horse brought good news. He told his people, "The Mexican government will

welcome you and give you food, cows, money, and good land in the state of Coahuila.”

On that day Rose and her family and the group of black Seminoles, Seminoles, runaway blacks, and other Indians finally found freedom. Three months later they officially became free citizens of Mexico. They discovered other black Indians who had escaped slavery earlier living there. It was a joyous time! The Mexican Government granted the black Seminoles land at Nacimiento, twenty miles northwest of the Mexican capital, Muzquiz. Wild Cat and his Seminole Indians settled about four miles away.

That’s when they started calling my people the Mascogos de Nacimiento. Today we still are known as Mascogos in Mexico. But now let me tell you about how my great-grandmama Rose got married. She told me about it right before she died. She told me she was happy.

Soon after they arrived in Mexico, Rose turned seventeen, and she married a black Seminole named Thomas Factor. He was older than Rose. Tena and Kelina were proud of the union because Thomas was a leader in the community. Kelina had surprised Rose before the wedding. He made a special trip to Muzquiz and bought some blue calico so that Tena could make Rose a special wedding dress. Kelina knew that she favored the color blue. Tena sewed on the lace collar from Rose’s old Sunday dress that had traveled with her in her knapsack all the way from Indian Territory.

Everyone was excited because this was the first wedding in their new home in Mexico. Rose and Thomas wanted to honor the traditions of their ancestors in Florida who had fled from South Carolina and Georgia to freedom. So Rose and Thomas jumped over the broom on this day just as Tena and Kelina had done many years before. But they jumped in freedom on this joyous occasion! The black Seminoles all gathered around the couple forming a circle. They stomped³⁵ around the couple and sang the old traditional songs. Rose told me that was the first time in her young life that she remembered being happy and not afraid, looking forward to a new future in a new country where she could be free.

After the ceremony the older men of the group pulled out the old plank tables, and the women loaded them with foods of all kinds—cinnamon sofkee, fry bread, crispy fried pork, barbecued wild turkey, and pots of Mexican-made peach and fig preserves. As part of the preparations, the men

had even ridden their mules up into the Sierra Madres to cut down the palm tree for the women to make the traditional coonta.³⁶ Tena's old brass bowl was filled with a tea made from mulberries the children had gathered along the banks of the Sabinas River.

After the wedding Rose and Thomas went to live in a little house in Nacimiento made of sticks. Thomas had chopped the wooden poles to make the house and skillfully woven mesquite branches to make the walls. Rose had then covered the outside with mud to keep out the wind. Thomas also fashioned a table for Rose and planted a peach tree as her wedding present. They were happy. With the other men, Kelina cleared brush for their communal fields. Rose and her other female kin helped to plant the corn, pumpkins, beans, squash, and other vegetables that were part of their traditional diet. Kelina, along with Rose's husband, Thomas, joined Chief John Horse in becoming important leaders in the small Nacimiento community. Whatever they did, they did it together in those days.

Rose took out the little red velvet cloth and the old book and placed them on the rough table.

My people were free at last.

Rose and Thomas later had many children. The first one was my own grandmamma Amelia. She raised me because my mama, Nellie, had to go out and work. But that is another story. I think about all those old people, and what they went through looking for freedom. Some of them are buried here in the cemetery in Nacimiento. Rose, Tena, and Kelina are buried here. I visit them when I come to Nacimiento and sing spirituals. I am real proud of what my ancestors did.

Key Terms

¹ Coahuila is a state in Mexico bordered on the north by Texas.

² The Sierra Madre is a mountain range in northern Mexico where Alice's ranch is located.

³ Indian Territory was a reservation set aside for Indians by the U.S. Government after they were removed from their native lands. It included present-day Oklahoma north and east of the Red River and parts of Kansas and Nebraska. In 1907 it was abolished when Oklahoma became a state.

⁴ *Seminole* comes from the Spanish word *cimarrón*, meaning runaway, or maroon. The Seminole Indians were Creeks and other Indians who ran away to Florida to escape war and European oppression in the 18th century. In Florida they built towns, planted fields, and continued their traditions as before. Unlike the Creeks and Cherokees and other southeastern Indians, the Seminoles adopted blacks into their group and gave them shelter instead of making them slaves as it is commonly defined.

⁵ A plantation is a large agricultural business or farm on which cash crops are grown. Plantations in the southeast were worked by a large force of enslaved blacks. Profits depended on this labor force.

⁶ Gullah is a term applied to people of African origins living in the Sea Islands of Georgia or in South Carolina.

⁷ The Gullah language is a form of Creole, which is a language spoken by blacks who were brought from Africa by slave traders. It was influenced by many other languages, such as Spanish, French, and English, and is still spoken in Central American and South American countries.

⁸ Florida was initially a Spanish colony and offered a haven for black runaways, since it did not condone slavery like the English colonies. Blacks fled to St. Augustine on the eastern coast of Florida, where they formed the first free black community in North America. The blacks fought with the Spanish in the early 1800s against the British and later against the Americans.

⁹ A large wooden mortar and pestle were used to grind and pound the corn before cooking it.

¹⁰ The Trail of Tears is a term used to describe the forced Indian removals from their ancestral lands in the southeastern United States. Actually the Indians and black Indians traveled by boat over sea or rivers and over land depending on their geographical location.

¹¹ Wealthy Cherokee Indians also had black slaves with whom they intermarried. They were forced to leave for Indian Territory and traveled by different routes; many of them perished.

¹² The Seminole and black Seminole Indians also were forced to leave for Indian Territory beginning in 1838.

¹³ The Arkansas River is a tributary of the Mississippi River.

¹⁴ The Suwannee River flows through southern Georgia and northern Florida, ultimately emptying into the Gulf of Mexico.

¹⁵ A mangrove is a tree with large roots that thrives in swamps.

¹⁶ The Alachua Plains was an area of wide prairies dotted with lakes located in north-central Florida.

¹⁷ King Payne succeeded Cowkeeper, one of the first Seminole chiefs, as chief of the Alachua Seminole Indians.

¹⁸ Billy Bowlegs was also known as Powas Tustanugge. Billy Bowlegs would become a principal Seminole leader in the Third Seminole War (1855-1858) refusing to surrender to the U.S. Army. He and his exhausted warriors though finally gave up, leaving their homes in the Florida Everglades. He died soon after he arrived in Indian Territory. Many of the black Seminole people today carry Bowlegs as their surname.

¹⁹ “Jumping over the broom” was a form of marriage ceremony among people of African origin and is recorded as occurring among the black Seminoles in Mexico.

²⁰ Wild Cat (Coacoochee) was a Seminole Indian chief who fiercely resisted the U.S. Army in Florida. Once he was captured in Florida but cleverly escaped. He and John Horse fought in the Second Seminole War together and eventually led their people to freedom in Mexico. Wild Cat died of smallpox in Mexico in 1857. Many of the Seminole Indians returned to reservations in Oklahoma after that.

²¹ In winnowing, the rice was tossed in the air so the heavier grains would be left in the basket and the lighter grains would blow away.

²² A “basket name” was given to a child at birth among the Gullah people. Sometimes it became a nickname. The tradition was carried to the Americas from Africa.

²³ Irrigation ditches and dams are a form of floodwater management that is crucial to growing rice. Rice grows in submerged soils, unlike other crops.

²⁴ Micanopy was chief of the Seminole Nation during the Second Seminole War. He was friendly to the Americans at first, but after treaties were broken he decided to fight.

²⁵The Second Indian War (1835-1842) started because the Seminole Indians did not want to leave Florida so soon. It lasted for seven years, and many people on both the Indian and the American sides were killed.

²⁶ John Horse also went by the nickname of Gopher John as a young man. In Spanish his name was Juan Caballo. He was born a slave in Florida but was granted his freedom by his master and later became a warrior, diplomat, and chief advisor to the Seminole Chief Osceola in Florida.

²⁷ Brigadier General Thomas Jesup was Quartermaster General of the U. S. Army who fought against the Seminole Indians and Black Seminoles

²⁸ Tampa Bay, Florida, is the port from where the black Seminoles departed for Indian Territory.

²⁹ The Waco, or Hueco, Indians were a branch of the Wichita Indians. Many of them lived on the Brazos River near the present day city of Waco. They built large villages and grew crops like corn, beans, and squash.

³⁰ Wild Cat met with the Comanches, Kickapoos, and Tonkawas.

³¹ The Red River that divides Texas from Oklahoma was named for the red rocks over which the water flowed.

³² Sofkee was the traditional southeastern Indian corn soup. It is like hominy.

³³ A javelina is a kind of pig that is also called a collared peccary or a musk hog. It was often hunted for its meat.

³⁴ The Kickapoo Indians eventually settled next to the black Seminoles at Nacimiento.

³⁵ Stomping was a kind of dancing practiced by the black Seminoles that had Indian and African origins.

³⁶ Coontie or *Zamia Floridana* is a low-growing palm-like plant with fringed leaves that grows in Florida. The name of the food *coontie* comes from this plant. The roots were processed by the Seminole Indians and black Seminoles into flour. Later, when the black Seminoles settled in Mexico, they had to find a substitution for the flour that was part of their staple. The black Seminoles used another kind of palmetto or palm tree that grows in the Sierra Madre of Mexico to make their coonta, or coontie.