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Who says heroes are supposed to be people with superhuman gifts? Sure, when we think of superheroes we think of people who can fly, lift cars, or shoot laser beams out of their eye sockets—but let me tell you about this incredible man that I know we can all learn from.

Thornton Blackburn was a slave. No crime on earth is severe enough to beget a punishment of taking a man's free will. In 1831 however, he escaped. This escape was highly publicized and caused the very first race riot in Detroit. This race riot paved the way to the genesis of the United States' Riot Commission. After crossing the border to Canada, Thornton was protected by the Canadian Government, with Major General Sir John Colborne saying "a lifetime of slavery is too severe a punishment for any crime less than murder...." and "a person could not steal himself...." referring to Thornton's escape from slavery in Detroit.

Canadian Courts defended Thornton Blackburn and therefore solidifying its name as a safe haven for black refugees late from slavery.

After receiving protection from the Canadian Government, Thornton, along with his wife, worked tirelessly to abolish slavery and aid other Underground Railroad Refugees settle in Canada. Anti-slavery leader George Brown, helped former slaves as well with the aid of Thornton.

In 1999, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada designated the Blackburns as “Persons of National Historic Significance” and commended their inspirational story for their personal struggle and fight for freedom as well as their emblematic tale representing not only theirs, but several more undocumented (even unsuccessful) slavery escape cases. The Blackburns’ relentless battle for the abolition of slavery prompted the articulation of *legal defense against slavery*. This was *The Slavery Abolition Act* of 1833. It received Royal Assent in August 28th 1833 and finally took effect a year later, on August 1st 1834. This act abolished black enslavement in most British Colonies, freeing over 80 000 slaves in the Caribbean, South Africa, and a small number in Canada. In 2000, plaques in their honour were erected in both their homes. One plaque designated in Toronto, Ontario and another in Louisville, Kentucky.

So what can the youth of today learn from Thornton in order to shape the future for generations to come? Like all slaves, Thornton struggled with his own shackles to slavery. He must've entertained the thought of escaping more than once—of course he was afraid. But he didn't let fear stop him. Therefore the first lesson the youth of today can learn from Thornton Blackburn: take that leap of faith. You'll never know what you can really achieve unless you give it your best shot—and like all dreams, it always starts with that one shaky step before it can turn into a full-on sprint that can amaze millions. Free yourself from your shackles of self-doubt and just run.

Race was also a challenge for Thornton. The severe discrimination for blacks during his time almost equated to no other option for opportunity other than slavery. But he pushed through anyway and became a pioneer for abolishing such injustice. Therefore, the second lesson the youth of today must understand: there will be great challenges to overcome. Some may even seem impossible to bypass, but no fortress is foolproof. There *will* always be a loophole—and once you find it, do it again and again until you find your way to the path less trodden.

It's amazing to think how the students of today are the future leaders of tomorrow. Honestly, look at those unenthusiastic faces and chatter. You'd think it was a joke, putting our future into such an incapable bunch, but no. What I see in the youth of today is the future. I call out to the kids who stay up until 3am, those who barely get a 50% on a math quiz, those who struggle with the first lines of an essay let alone the body and conclusion. I call to you, unlikely future heroes, shapers, futures of the generations. Break your shackles. Like Thornton did before you and use his story to fuel your hopes and dreams.

Choose brilliance.

...But he pushed through anyway and became a pioneer for abolishing such injustice.

William Hall
 Lincoln Alexander
 Carnegie; Thornton
 Maurice R. Redlick;
 Oscar Peterson; Mississauga
 Pierpoint
 Ware; Hugh
 Braithwaite
 Hill; Josiah
 Anderson Ruff
 Elijah McCoy

...But he pushed
 a pioneer