

Tukufu: We drove an hour and a half Northeast for our next investigation in Sacramento. Here, a small treasure trove of documents, letters, and photographs relating to the legendary abolitionist John Brown was recently found hidden in a garage. I'm Tukufu Zuberi, and I just can't conceal my excitement. In 1859, Brown led the famous raid on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry. A committed abolitionist, he reasoned that the only way to defeat the evil of slavery was to take up arms. Even though Americans were divided on the use of violence as a means for ending slavery, John Brown was a major catalyst for its abolition. And for that reason, he is one of my personal heroes. With a group of his followers, he planned to seize the weapons held at Harper's Ferry and so spark a slave revolt. But his plan failed. John Brown himself paid the ultimate price for his beliefs. Marines stormed the arsenal, killing most of Brown's followers, including two of his sons. Brown himself was captured and later hanged. But the consequences of Brown's actions at Harper's Ferry were immense. His reasoned arguments and personal bravery inspired many others. There's no doubt in my mind that the Harper's Ferry raid was a key step toward the abolition of slavery. I believe that I owe a debt to John Brown. So when I heard that a stash of his personal effects had been discovered almost 150 years after his death, I just couldn't wait to get out here and get this investigation going. It's a story that starts with a family legend that Laurie deal heard from her grandmother, and which set her on a journey to explore her family history. Laurie, tell me about what your grandmother told you.

Laurie: My grandmother told me that we might be related to John Brown. There were letters and family albums in the garage, and I thought, I'm going to take a look at them. And when I got out to the garage, I found this box. There were some things related to John Brown.

Tukufu: Really?

Laurie: Yeah, and it got me thinking, maybe the stories are true. What I found in the box, there is actually a letter from John Brown to his wife.

Tukufu: Whoa! In 1854, written from Norfolk, Connecticut. This is a personal letter from John Brown written five years before Harper's Ferry. This is a very important letter.

Laurie: I thought it was.

Tukufu: Now, what else do you have?

Laurie: There's a photo of John Brown. M-hm. And he's written something to his wife. And a personal photo.

Tukufu: Okay, we have this authentic letter from John Brown. We have a personalized picture from John Brown. I want to go and see if I can use this evidence to find out if your grandmother's story was, in fact, true.

Laurie: I'd like to know. I really would.

Tukufu: So how did some of John Brown's personal effects end up in Laurie's grandmother's garage on the west coast, the other side of the country from where John Brown lived and died in the east? Could Laurie really be related to John Brown, or is there some other link between the two families? I am very passionate about it. I want to be able to pass on that information. It's just really important to me. The first thing I want to do is take a closer look through Laurie's box to see if I can find any clues. In particular, I want to examine the letter from John Brown to his wife. It's an extremely personal letter that captures an intimate moment in the private life of the abolitionist.

"I forgot to remind the boys about seeing that the calves and little bulls have plenty of water, either by digging a large hole on the run near the corner of meadow or by carrying them water from the well or by driving them to McCalister spring."

John Brown was a legend, but this letter reminds me that he was also an ordinary man trying to make his living on a small farm in Connecticut. For all his fame and heroism, he was also a husband and a father. The boys he refers to were his sons, who were to die fighting by his side at Harper's Ferry less than five years later. The next letter underlines the personal consequences of Brown's execution. Now this is a letter from Wendell Phillips, one of the leaders in the abolitionist movement. June 15th, 1872, to Miss Brown.

"I enclose a check for \$1,350. You will get it cashed the same way you did the one I sent you before."

Wendell Phillips is providing money to the widow of John Brown. So 13 years after John Brown's death, his memory lives on. The abolitionist movement is giving financial support to his widow and family. What is Laurie doing with such an important historical document? On the back of the letter is the first clue that links the Brown family to Laurie. On the inscription on the back of the letter, it says very clearly that Sarah Brown, the daughter of John Brown, who raided Harper's Ferry, gave this letter to Lucy Higgins. The Lucy Higgins referred to here is Laurie's great-great-grandmother and she knew Sarah Brown, John Brown's daughter. Here's a clear link between Laurie's family and the Browns. But why did Sarah give such personal and precious documents to Lucy Higgins? After all, these are the kind of family heirlooms which usually stay within the family. Time for me to do some genealogical research. It seems that there may just be something in the story Laurie's heard from her grandmother. Maybe she is related to the Brown family. To research your family history, you must go through any old letters, documents, and photos and write down all the surnames you can find. The size of your task will depend on the size of your family. Laurie's family isn't difficult to trace and soon names are popping out everywhere. Harlow, Smith, Crabb, Slater, Bates, Higgins and, of course, our very own Laurie Deal. I'm building up quite a family tree. The next step is to see if any of these names appear in the Brown family tree, and here I'm in luck. 2,000 miles away in Hudson, Ohio, they've already created a John Brown genealogy index, which is just as well for me. John Brown had a huge family. He had 2 wives, 20 children, of whom 10 survived into adulthood. John Brown, his father and his grandfather between them had 60 children in all. Gwendolyn Mayer is responsible for maintaining the 1500 names on the Brown index.

Gwendolyn: We have a rolodex system. Each card represents an individual. These are all descendants of John Brown. And each card has a number on it that refers me back to this genealogy book, which has each marriage and each child of each marriage underneath John Brown.

Tukufu: I've done some genealogical research of Laurie's family and come up with a list of surnames. My first surname is Harlow.

Gwendolyn: I don't see any Harlows.

Tukufu: No Harlows, okay. William Smith. Crabb. Slater. No. Bates. Higgins.

Gwendolyn: I don't have any Higgins. Lewis. No.

Tukufu: So I've come all the way to Ohio to find out that John Brown's daughter, Sarah Brown, and Laurie's great-great-grandmother, Lucy Higgins, weren't related. So what was the link between these two ladies? I did get one lead in Ohio. Apparently in 1864, five years after Harper's Ferry, Sarah Brown moved with her mother, sister, and brother to California. And in 1881, they moved to Saratoga, just a few hours' drive southwest of Laurie's house in Sacramento. The census records at the national archives in San Bruno should be

able to tell me if Lucy Higgins was living in the area at the same time. Okay, I think we're in luck. I have Louise Smith is Lucy's mother. And here she is, born in 1818, and she's born in Maine. Aha, so we have Lucy E. Higgins here, and she was born in 1846 and she's born in Missouri. Here's Lucy's husband, Rufus L. Higgins. Now, Rufus L. Higgins, his occupation is listed as real estate. For the first time we begin to see some similarities between the Higgins family and the Brown family. Both families, both the Higgins and Brown family, had their origins on the east coast, moved to the Midwest and ultimately ended up on the west coast in California. So I know that both Midwesterners ended up in the Saratoga area, and it makes sense that it was here that Sarah Brown gave Lucy Higgins her father's personal effects. But I still don't know why. I'm at the Santa Clara county clerk recorders office to look at the land deeds for the properties they lived in. I hope to find something here. Okay, this is the kind of thing I was looking for. Here's a land deed between Mary Brown and Sarah Brown. She's making a transfer of property to her daughter. And it's the Saratoga property and it's in 1882. And through this land deed, she's symbolically selling the property to her daughter. Let's see what else we have here. That's it! Here's a very important piece of information. Let me read it to you:

"Recorded at the request of R.L. Higgins!"

R.L. Higgins, we will recall from our census records, is the husband of Lucy Higgins and he's in the real estate business, another connection between Sarah Brown and Lucy Higgins. Could this property transfer arranged by Lucy's husband be how she and Sarah met for the first time, or was the transaction the result of an ongoing friendship? I'd like to found out more about Sarah Brown as a person. April Halbersta at the Saratoga historical museum should be able to help.

April: Sarah was a person who was very active in her church. She was a Congregationalist. She taught Sunday school here. She might have been like her father and a very highly principled person.

Tukufu: Why do you say she was a very principled person?

April: Some Japanese farm workers came to her and wanted to know more about religion, and were interested in learning more about the bible, and she didn't speak Japanese and they didn't speak any English. She taught herself Japanese in order to be able to help these people with their bible lessons and

April: Some Japanese farm workers came to her and wanted to know more about religion, and were interested in learning more about the bible, and she didn't speak Japanese and they didn't speak any English. She taught herself Japanese in order to be able to help these people with their bible lessons and their education. So very much like her father, she was concerned about the rights of others, people who were deprived full equality and things of that nature. And she was a natural teacher, too, and sort of a natural leader. I think that she probably really followed in his footsteps.

Tukufu: But what about Lucy Higgins and her mother, Louise Smith? What kind of people were they? I'm at the California state library to see if I can find anything in the local newspapers and periodicals. I can't find anything relating to Lucy Higgins, but I do find something very interesting about her mother, Louise Smith. It's an obituary recorded in a California publication, 'The Grizzly Bear'.

"Mrs. Louise Harlow Smith passed away at Santa Clara June 22nd. Mrs. Smith was a pioneer of the women's suffrage movement, and was very closely identified with its work. And because of her zeal in this direction, she became well-known over the entire state."

Lucy Higgins' mother was a pioneer in the campaign for women for the right to vote. She was very similar to John Brown in that they both made sacrifices in their life. They both stood up for others. So it should come

as no surprise that these two families should come together in that sense of common belief. Now, I know that I can't prove that this is what linked the two families together, but the circumstantial evidence is pretty good, and it's backed up by an old newspaper clipping in Laurie's box.

"Miss Sarah Brown, daughter of John Brown of Harper's Ferry, chats on the porch with Miss Lucy Higgins. Their talk undoubtedly included a few comments on 'abolition days.' They shared a common belief in the struggle for humanity, which is the legacy of Sarah Brown from her father, John Brown."

Sarah Brown never married and she didn't have any children, so it makes sense that she would pass on her legendary father's personal effects to her good friend, Lucy Higgins. So friendship, not family, is the reason why some of John Brown's personal letters ended up in a California garage, far from Harper's Ferry and the scene of his great sacrifice. I'm taking Laurie to the site of Sarah Brown's Saratoga property. The house is no longer standing. All that's left are some foundations. It was in the land deeds for this property that I found the first solid connections between Lucy and Sarah, and it was in this peaceful place that they spent much time in each other's company. Your great-great-grandmother, Lucy Higgins, and Sarah Brown, John Brown's daughter, would have spent a considerable amount of time here talking.

Laurie: My gosh.

Tukufu: Lucy Higgins and Sarah Brown were related in social consciousness. They were both committed to the rights of people. They were close friends, and they spent a lot of time together talking about political issues, even about the abolitionist days.

Laurie: That's neat. That's neat.

Tukufu: Lucy Higgins' mother, your great-great-great-grandmother, Louise Harlow Smith, was very similar to John Brown. She was a pioneer in the movement for women's rights to vote. Like John Brown, she stood up for the rights of people. So she was -- she was known for speaking her mind. Your box of letters and effects connects you to the moments when we talk about standing up for people's rights. The history means a lot to me, it really does. But his soul goes marching on.