

Dear Oprah,

October 26, 2001

Fourteen years after the end of slavery, in 1879, my great-grandfather Jesse Robertson bought 100 acres of land in East Texas and bequeathed it to his descendants. Recently, my brother and I spearheaded a successful effort to save the land by paying \$35,000 in back taxes. Inspired by the wonderful stories brought forth on your show, Oprah, we dedicated ourselves to preserving the birthright that this former slave struggled to give to his family.

We face further hurdles and hope that you may be open to assisting us by putting us in contact with any non-profit groups or persons you know of who may be sympathetic to our cause and willing to help us. The land lay disregarded for 50 years except for timber poachers and litterers who took and continue to take advantage of the property being unoccupied. We hope to reclaim our heritage by making the land productive and of service to others. We know that there are organizations geared toward helping communities and people that need land to provide their services. Our thoughts have turned to ways to utilize the property with businesses such as a home for wayward children, a nursing home for the elderly or even private business enterprises... anything to keep it in the family. We are in the process of trying to incorporate the Jesse Robertson Foundation but we need a lawyer who can help us organize and setup the Foundation legally and coordinate the effort of bringing the numerous heirs together, some of whom contributed generously to paying the back taxes. We would also like help toward clearing the title. We have done extensive research relating to deeds, oil/gas leases and wills pertaining to the property and have copies of the documents. Unfortunately, my brother and I had to contribute the bulk of that money and so are looking to working with someone who can get started without an enormous up front fee. We are also trying to buy back 5 acres that Jesse Robertson sold to the railroad which splits the land. This 5 acre strip have been sold and bought by three parties since the railroad went out of business. We can only imagine what it must have taken for an ex-slave to come up with the \$500 that the land cost at that time.

Along with the rest of the country, I have been a fan of yours for many years. One of your recent shows with Phil McGraw helped me heal after being forced to retire from my job as a counselor in a school district plagued by racism. I feel that doing something positive with this land will not only validate the efforts of that long-ago slave ancestor, but will allow me to carry out my father's death-bed wish that my brother and I get involved in saving the land. The immediacy of slavery is highlighted by the interesting fact that Jesse Robertson's last child, my uncle, Lee Robertson, died only in 1989. Jesse Robertson had fourteen children, so getting the title clear is no small deal. I will say one thing for it, though: I have talked to and even met relatives I didn't even know about. We are in contact with the majority of the heirs and they want to work together to come to a successful solution for this project.

No one is living on the property currently. Nor are we aware of any of our relatives planning on moving to live on the land any time soon. We would like to see some organization or person get some use of the property and we get some help too in the way of organizing our Great Grandfathers Jesse Robertson's Foundation.

The property is prime land in a prime area of that part of east Texas. There is much development in progress in that area. So there is a tremendous upside to an organization or someone working with us to take control of the property and use it for productive purposes.

We would like to thank you in advance for any suggestions or referrals you might give us. And thank you too for your efforts to bring us all together in this nation.

Sincerely,

Letha Barrett (Robertson) on behalf of the Robertson Heirs