

Pass It On®...

Courage in a New World.

The story of Stagecoach Mary, the first Black woman to deliver mail in the Wild West.

We like our heroes larger than life, and we like them to be uncompromising in their determination. Mary Fields was tall, and as a recently freed slave in the 1860s, she was also fearless. She was good with a gun and not above a good fight. It was said that she “had the temperament of a grizzly bear,” which is probably how she survived the lawless West with its array of characters, each looking to get the jump on greenhorns.

Mary worked her way northwest on riverboats and taking odd jobs until she reached Toledo, Ohio, where she ended up in a most unlikely place: the Sacred Heart Convent. Here she was taken in by Sister Dunne, but Mary was quick to make a stir with her hard drinking, cursing and difficult nature. Yet she worked hard and fastidiously kept the convent gardens beautiful, albeit sometimes by cursing out nuns who crossed her lawn.

When Sister Dunne caught ill in Montana after being called there to start a school, Mary was off to take care of her. Sister Dunne regained her health, thanks to Mary’s devoted care. But it wasn’t long before Mary’s temperament got her kicked out of the newly established convent. Apparently, the bishop didn’t take kindly to her cursing, drinking, wearing men’s clothing and pulling a revolver on one of the janitors during an argument.

Turns out that Mary’s temperament and skill with a gun suited her perfectly in a different job as a mail carrier. It was a dangerous and arduous job. Mailbags were unloaded from a train onto a stagecoach and driven over rocky roads into a no man’s land where it seemed there were more bandits than settlers.

Mary was an imposing figure, with a rifle across her lap and a revolver on her hip. She scared off would-be thieves with her accurate shooting and drove the stagecoach hard through barren lands, often without stopping to rest. On days when the snow was too deep for the stagecoach, Mary strapped on snowshoes and carried the bags of mail on her back. She became as legendary as Paul Bunyan, braving every obstacle and maintaining the lifeline

of communication between relatives, friends, businesses and the law.

Stagecoach Mary became larger than life on the trail, but she was even bigger to the locals. Children loved her, and she was always kind and generous to them. She was often treated to free meals at restaurants and drinks at the saloon, where the regulars chatted with her until closing time.

Through her grit and steady devotion, Mary “Stagecoach” Fields forged a path into the heart of the West that many would follow. When she died, the funeral was the largest her town had ever seen.

Grit...PassItOn.com

By The Foundation for a Better Life®

The Foundation for a Better Life® promotes positive values to live by and pass along to others.

Copyright © 2022 | The Foundation for a Better Life®
All rights reserved. | www.passiton.com

Available under a Creative Commons Attribution NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 License (international):
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>