

Lincoln the Lawyer - Springfield

Narrator

Dr. Henry, Lincoln's friend

John Stuart, Lincoln's law partner

Widow

Young man who wants to be a lawyer

Angry man

Narrator: In 1837 Abraham Lincoln became a lawyer and moved to Springfield, Illinois. In addition to being a lawyer, he also served some of the time in the state legislature as a lawmaker. Many people asked his help with legal matters. He was still called "Honest Abe."

Widow: I am in need of a lawyer and I was hoping to hire Abraham Lincoln. Is he here?

John Stuart: No ma'am. He is not here right now. He will be here in a bit. Perhaps I can help you.

Widow: Well, do you think Lincoln is a good lawyer for me? I mean, is he really honest?

John Stuart: I assure you my partner is as honest as the day is long. Why, here is Lincoln's dear friend Dr. Henry. Let's ask him. Do you think Lincoln is honest?

Dr. Henry: Here's a story that might answer that. Did you know Abraham used to be a postmaster in New Salem? They closed down the post office because it was so tiny they just didn't need it. Abraham moved here to Springfield right after that.

Widow: Then what happened?

Dr. Henry: One day a post office official stepped up and asked for the money from the New Salem Post Office. It was over \$17.00. I was afraid Abraham wouldn't have the money he asked for, so I offered to lend him the money.

Widow: Did Lincoln take the loan? I heard he doesn't like to borrow money.

Dr. Henry: No need. Abraham went over to his trunk at his boarding house, and came back with an old blue sock tied in a knot. He untied it and poured out silver and copper coins. When he counted it was the right amount, to the cent. And it was exactly the same coins he had received from the postal customers. Lincoln would never use money that was not his.

Widow: Why does he always seem to not have enough money? It seems that if he were a good lawyer he would have lots of money.

Dr. Henry: Oh, he is a very good lawyer, but you see he once owned a store back in New Salem. It went out of business. His partner in the store died leaving him a large debt which he is still paying back. That leaves him short of money.

Widow: If his partner died, he should not have to pay back the partner's half.

Dr. Henry: Yes, you are right. But Abraham felt it was the right thing to do to pay back the whole debt, even if it takes him fifteen years.

Widow: Well. He does sound honest.

John Stuart: Oh here he is now. Abraham. The lady here would like to hire you for her lawyer.

Abraham: Well ma'am. Let me hear the details of your case. Perhaps we can settle your case without going to court.

Widow: Whatever do you mean?

Abraham: I mean, we should try to persuade your neighbors to compromise. Each person should give in a little and reach an agreement. A lawyer should be a peacemaker.

Widow: Fine, Mr. Lincoln. You are hired. Let's try to settle the matter peacefully.

Narrator: Just then a young man came in. He was wondering if he should become a lawyer,

Young man: I would like to know if I should be a lawyer. It's very hard work to study the law. Did you have to study hard?

Abraham: Of course I did. And I had no school to go to. I borrowed books and taught myself. There was one big book I owned for myself. Back when I was a store keeper a man traded a barrel for some supplies. He told me the barrel was full of useless trash. But in the bottom of the barrel was a big thick law book.

Young man: I do want to be a lawyer. I hope I will be able to do the work to learn the law. And I hope the hard work will be worth it.

Abraham: Well, are you honest?

Young man: Does it matter?

Abraham: There is a popular belief that all lawyers are dishonest.

Young Man: I do think I am honest. I want to be honest.

Abraham: If you want to be a lawyer, do not think for a minute that you can be honest. Promise yourself to be honest at all times.

Young man: Yes, sir. I will try to be honest.

Abraham: Well, if you find that you cannot be an honest lawyer, decide to be honest without being a lawyer. Choose some other job for yourself.

John Stuart: Here is another person looking for a lawyer. Can we help you?

Angry man: Yes. I am very angry with my neighbor. She owes me six hundred dollars. I want it now.

Abraham: Does the poor woman have six hundred dollars?

Angry man: I suppose not, but I don't care. I just want my money.

Abraham: Yes, I'm sure we can win this case for you. But it looks to me as if your poor neighbor woman and her children have as much of a claim to the money as you do.

Angry man: What are you saying? I am willing to pay you a lot of money to take my case.

Abraham: We shall not take your case, but will give you a little advice for which we will charge you nothing. You seem to be a healthy young man; we would advise you to try your hand at making six hundred dollars in some other way.

Angry man: Well!

Narrator: The angry young man stomped out of the law office.

Young man: I see Mr. Lincoln that it is not always easy to be an honest lawyer.

John Stuart: Yes, more than once I have seen my young partner turn down a case because it did not seem just right.

Abraham: There are just some cases I couldn't take. All the time while standing talking to that jury, I'd be thinking, 'Lincoln, you're a liar'; and I believe I should forget myself and say it out loud."

John Stuart: And do you remember that case where the witness lied?

Lincoln: Yes. I was sure we had won that case, until I realized the key witness was lying.

Young man: What did you do?

Lincoln: I turned to the judge and the jury and I said, "Gentlemen, I depended on this witness to clear my client. He has lied. I ask that no attention be paid to his testimony. Let his words be stricken out, if my case fails. I do not wish to win in this way."

Young man: Mr. Lincoln. I do want to be a lawyer as good and as honest as you.

Abraham: Always remember that your own promise to yourself is more important than anything.

Young man: Yes sir. I will succeed.