



An Old Secret



Chapter Eight - by Russ and Kay Hively

Joe was stunned. What did he mean, an old secret? Mr. Wardlaw set the campstool on the grass and began to tell Joe a story. The older man said that his father had been a cowboy on the Chisholm Trail and knew this county.

When his father heard that the Indian Territory was going to be opened up to settlers in 1889, he came to stake a claim on some land. He said the Wardlaw family claim was next to the Porter claim. Mr. Wardlaw said that he and Joe's grandfather, Shelton Porter, were the same age and they became best friends.

Mr. Wardlaw said that when the Spanish-American War broke out in 1898 he was 18 years old and enlisted in the Navy. Before he left, he asked Joe's grandfather to help take care of the Wardlaw family while he was away.

Joe had no idea that Mr. Wardlaw and his grandfather had grown up best friends. He thought this was a really interesting story, but wondered what it had to do with the strange things happening on the farm.

The older man continued. Shortly after Mr. Wardlaw shipped out with the Navy, his father was accidentally killed on the farm. Shelton Porter had sworn to help the Wardlaw family while his best friend was at sea. So for the next year, Shelton worked the Wardlaw family farm until his friend could get back to Oklahoma.

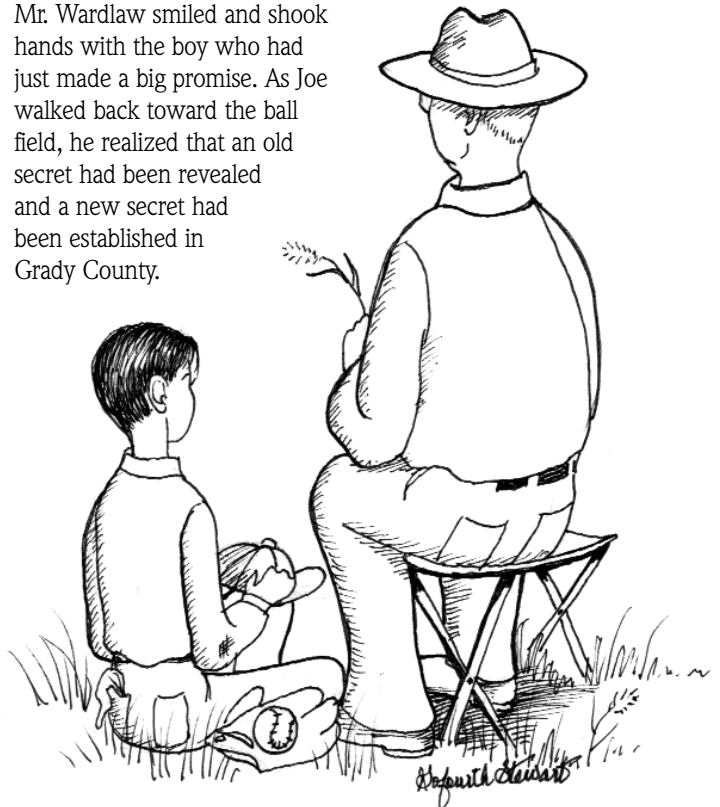
"Wow," was all Joe could say. His grandfather had worked on a neighbor's farm for a full year. Joe had done enough work on his dad's farm to understand what that meant. But Joe still wondered why Mr. Wardlaw was telling him this story.

The older man could see that Joe was interested in the story, but that he was a little confused. Mr. Wardlaw smiled at the boy and said he had been responsible for the food on the porch, for loading the truck with watermelons, and filled the gas tank. Joe's mind started to whirl. He looked at Mr. Wardlaw and asked why.

The kindly grocer said that Joe's Grandfather would not take money for his work on the farm. Instead, Grandfather Shelton had made Mr. Wardlaw promise that if the Porters ever really needed help, the Wardlaw family would be there to help. The older man told Joe that he had waited all these years to pay back his friend. He said when he heard that Joe's father had not hired anyone to help pick melons, it was time to fulfill his promise.

The man looked at the boy and asked if he was going to tell anyone what he had just heard. Joe shook his head and told Mr. Wardlaw that the secret was safe. Then he promised that if the Wardlaw's ever needed help, the Porters would be there again for them.

Mr. Wardlaw smiled and shook hands with the boy who had just made a big promise. As Joe walked back toward the ball field, he realized that an old secret had been revealed and a new secret had been established in Grady County.



Author Kay Hively and Illustrator Billie Gofourth-Stewart are both of Neosho, Mo. Russ Hively lives in Newtonia, Mo. Produced by the Missouri Press Foundation. Copyright 2006.

Things to Think About and Do

A. It took Mr. Wardlaw a long time to get home from the Spanish-American War. Find out why it could have taken a whole year for Mr. Wardlaw to get home in an emergency in 1898.

B. Joe promised to keep Mr. Wardlaw's secret. Why is keeping a secret or a promise important? Write a paragraph on why keeping your word is important.

STANDARDS - G1:2; SS:5; G4:4; CA:1