

Black Thunder



Chapter Six – by Kay Hively

It was the best Christmas the Cooper family ever had. Joey and Tommy put up the Christmas tree. They decorated it with popcorn, dried berries and paper ornaments that Joey and his mother had made.

On Christmas Eve, the little family gathered around the tree. A fire crackled away in the old stove and there was popcorn and apple cider. After everyone had settled down around the fire, Mr. Cooper pulled the lamp close to his chair and read the Biblical Christmas story.

Then everyone told stories about the past year. Mrs. Cooper told how proud she was to have one son graduate from college. She was also proud that her other son had discovered the wonders of the town library.

Mr. Cooper talked about the money he had made on the farm this year. Then he surprised everyone by saying they would soon get electricity. He said they could have lights in all the rooms, and they could have a refrigerator.

Joey stood up and announced that he had grown two inches in the last year. He also said he liked getting letters from his brother.

Then it was Tommy's turn. He told how happy he was to be a Tuskegee Airman. But, he said, there was something else at Tuskegee that was important to him.

As everyone listened, Tommy told about an old professor who taught at Tuskegee Institute, a college near the airfield where the Tuskegee Airmen trained. The professor's name was George Washington Carver. Tommy said the professor had been born a slave before the end of the Civil War.

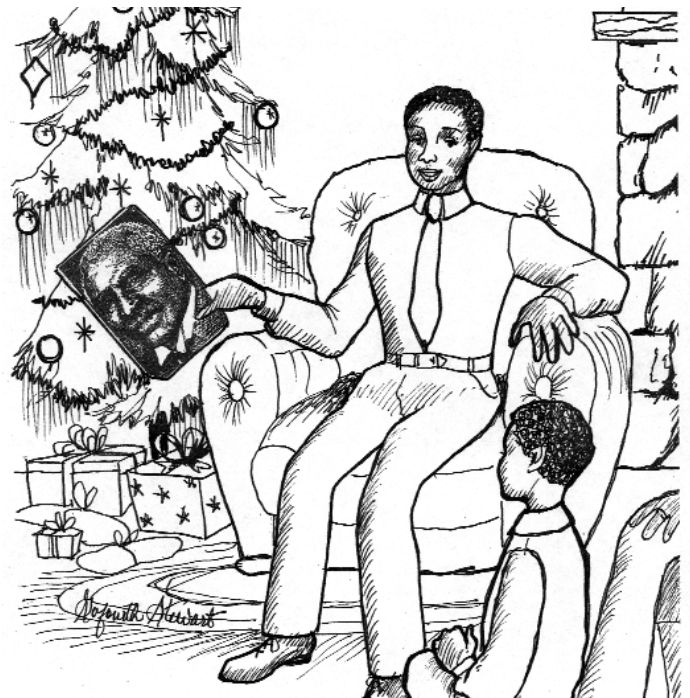
He said that even though Dr. Carver was famous all over the world, he was very humble. He said Dr. Carver took very little credit for the great things he was doing as a scientist. Tommy said Dr. Carver's work was very important because it was making life better for thousands of people.

Tommy had been reading about Dr. Carver, and he had talked to people who knew him personally. Everyone said he was a great man.

Even though Dr. Carver had now become very sick, he still wanted to stay at Tuskegee. He wanted to carry on his work in his laboratory. Much of the time Dr. Carver was too sick to work, but his students at Tuskegee Institute were doing his work for him.

Tommy said everyone who met Dr. Carver was changed by the humble little man who had devoted his life to helping others. Tommy said he respected Dr. Carver and wanted to be like him.

When Tommy finished talking about George Washington Carver, he gave Joey a picture of the great scientist. That night, Joey put Dr. Carver's picture up on the wall beside the picture of his brother. Now there were two heroes in Joey's bedroom.



Author Kay Hively and Illustrator Billie Gofourth-Stewart are both of Neosho, Missouri. Produced in partnership with this newspaper and the Missouri Press Foundation. Copyright 2004.

Classroom Extensions

Things to Think About and Do –

- Read a book about George Washington Carver, then write a report about his childhood. List some of the great things Dr. Carver did as a scientist.
- Using a road map, find the airport nearest Tuskegee, Alabama. Then list the numbers of all the highways you would have to travel if you went by car from your town to Tuskegee.

Next Week: Chapter Seven – The Christmas present