

Colorful Characters

Chapter 4 - by Kay Hively

Each morning George was out of bed early, eager to get his chores done. In the past, when things were slow at the inn, he would go down to the river and watch the flatboats coming and going.

But now he did not leave the inn. He waited each day for Mr. Harding to come to the dining room.

When he came from his private room, Mr. Harding always carried his sketch bag, and he always sat at the table near the fireplace.

George liked serving coffee and meals to the inn's honored guest.

Because his father wanted him to learn from Mr. Harding, George was not required to work at other jobs when the artist was in the dining room.

Although he was never allowed to make a mark on the drawing of Daniel Boone, George watched

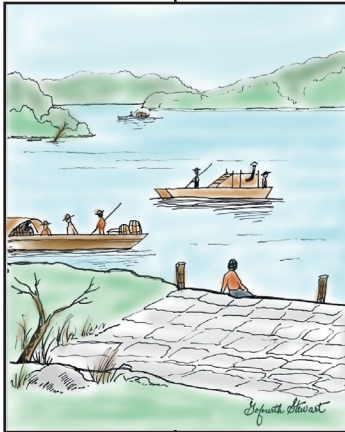
everything the artist did. As he worked, Mr. Harding would often explain what he was doing. George practically memorized every word the man said.

Sometimes Mr. Harding allowed George to use some of the drawing pencils from his bag. Mr. Bingham had gone to the newspaper office and bought two large pieces of blank newspaper print.

Using this paper, George practiced drawing under the guidance of Mr. Harding.

George did not draw portraits like the one of Daniel Boone.

He drew trees and flowers and even made a sketch of the Square and Compass. He drew the kettles and pots in the fireplace. Mr. Harding explained how to draw light and dark, and how to arrange things in a picture.



Working with Mr. Harding was the most exciting thing George had done in all his nine years. His desire to draw and paint became stronger as he saw how his own art was improving.

But, the dreaded day finally came. Mr. Harding finished his preliminary sketching, and said it was time to leave. He was going back to St. Louis and then maybe back to his home in New York.

The day George said good-bye to his friend and teacher, the weather turned very cool. It was autumn on the Missouri River. At mid-morning, George and his father walked down to the river with Chester Harding. The three had become good friends and the parting was friendly, but sad for George.

After Mr. Harding left on a boat headed downstream, George's father returned to the inn. George, however, just sat on the dock thinking about his future. He watched the boatmen who were moving their vessels in and out of the river.

All the merchants and shopkeepers along the river were ordering supplies for the winter. Many overland traders were stocking up on goods to sell on the frontier.

Most of the boatmen sang as they worked. Life was busy on the river, and hearing the song of the boatmen made George so happy that he felt better about losing his new friend.

Next Chapter: A Dark Time

Things to Think About and Do

1. Ask at a newspaper in your area for some newsprint, and practice artwork on your own. If you can get a small roll of newsprint, ask if your class can create a "class mural."
2. The boatmen liked to sing, and some of the songs they made up themselves. Many of the songs were about the river and about working on the boats. Become a songwriter and write a song that you might sing if you were a boatman on the Missouri River.
3. Chester Harding was a mentor to George Bingham. Look through your newspaper for people who would make good mentors. Write a list of questions to ask that person about his or her job, skill or talent. If you would like answers to your questions, with teacher permission, mail your questions or invite him or her to visit your classroom.

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