

Friend on the Trail

Chapter Eight - by Kay Hively

By the middle of the afternoon, everything in the O'Connor camp was ready for the journey into the mountains. The laundry had been brought to camp and put away. Wagon repairs had been made and all the axles were greased.

The oxen were watered, fed and resting. Everyone, even Martha's mother, had taken a bath.

Many people from the other wagons came by the camp to thank Matt and Martha for their rescue. Everyone was happy because those who had been sick with fever were either well or getting better.

Several of the men had hunted in early afternoon. After only three hours, they returned with eight elk, several rabbits and a deer. In a very short time, the animals were butchered and the meat divided among the families.

For the first time in many days, everyone could relax.

Late in the afternoon as the air began to cool, Martha's father built a fire and everyone helped cook supper. Fresh meat was a welcome change in the big black pot.

Joe had said meat would stay fresh for two or three days because it was cool in the mountains. Martha was happy to hear that. She liked fresh meat better than dried meat.

After supper, Mr. O'Connor brought out his fiddle and Matt found his harmonica. After tuning up their instruments, the two began to play. Soon people from nearby wagons came to listen. Mr. Johnson brought a fiddle and Bill Williams had a banjo. For two hours, everyone enjoyed the music. Some of the children even danced around the campfire. Martha had not had so much fun in a long time.

Finally, as the fire dwindled, people started back to their wagons.

Everyone knew that early the next morning the long hard pull up the mountain would begin.

Before the O'Connor family went to bed, Joe came by to visit. He said he had spent the day scouting the trail. It was in good shape. Several wagon trains had passed over it in the last month so that would make for easy passage. He said it was much colder in the mountains. He predicted they might see some snow up on the top of the mountain range. But it was early in the season, he said, the snow would not harm them. It would just be pretty to look at.

That night as the family made ready for bed, Mrs. O'Connor was able to tuck Martha into her blankets under the wagon. As she kissed her daughter good-night, Mrs. O'Connor said she was proud of Martha for all her work.

Now, she said, life would not be so hard.

As Martha lay in her bed ready to sleep, she thought about the good things in her life. Her mother was well again. Little Ruth was happy and healthy.

Matt was a hero. Even Johnny had worked hard on the trip. And Martha thought her father was very brave and kind.

Then Martha thought about her new Indian friend, Joe. She knew he would lead them safely to their new home. He truly had become a friend on the trail.



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Classroom Extensions

Things to Think About and Do -

- A. Do you play a musical instrument? Learn to play or sing a song that could have been played on the Oregon Trail. What is a ballad?
- B. Why would it be colder in the mountains than down on the plains? What is the freezing temperature at Fahrenheit? What is the freezing temperature at Celsius?