

Tales of Marvelous Missouri

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Chapter 7: Long Ago & Not So Far Away

Branson
MISSOURI

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Molly shut Birdle's diary and looked up at Elsie with wide, brown eyes.

"Fetching water? Washing clothes in a spring? Splitting wood? Canning food? That seems like a lot of work!"

Elsie laughed, standing up and looking around the cabin.

"Molly," she said. "It was a lot of work. Being a pioneer was a tough life. But pioneers helped shape Missouri."

Molly thought about this, but nothing in the cabin or Birdle's diary seemed like a part of the Missouri she knew.

Elsie went on.

"Pioneers came to Missouri and built cabins and homesteads like this one. Then they eked out a living in any way possible. Farming, trapping, and trading fur or other goods, logging, carpentry, etc. Families could barter and trade skills and goods with one another. Everyone worked hard all day on just maintaining the basics of survival for their families. Little by little, these small settlements turned into towns or even cities, and Missouri was settled this way."

Molly was skeptical.

"Maybe the small towns in Missouri," Molly said. "Like the ones we saw driving to Branson. But not St. Louis, where I'm from, or the other big cities."

Elsie laughed.

"You'd be surprised! St. Louis started as just a fur trapping post. So was Kansas City. Springfield was built as a farming community, and Jefferson City, Missouri's capital, was simply a trading post between Kansas City and St. Louis. It's taken 200 years of steady development for Missouri to become what it is today. But...," she said, looking around.

"Many, many Missourians started out in cabins just like this one, surviving off of the land."

"Wow," Molly said, imagining such a life.

"Dear me, child," Elsie said. "I've been babbling on for too long. We need to get you back to your family!"

Molly nodded, though she wasn't quite ready to leave Birdle's quiet cabin in the woods.

Molly gently set the diary on a little bedside table, where it sat neatly in a sparkling, shaft of sunlight before disappearing.

Elsie and Molly walked together out of the woods and were, rather suddenly, met by the screams, cheers, and laughter of the loud and bustling Silver Dollar City theme park.

"Molly!" a familiar voice called out. "A log cabin! You love log cabins!"

Molly's dad was coming toward her.

Molly turned to introduce to her family the elderly, kind woman who had taught her so much. But when she looked to her side, Elsie was gone.

Newspaper Connections:

Missouri's bicentennial will be in 2021. Many newspapers will soon begin having stories about how people in their areas lived in the early years. Start noting the differences and similarities among the stories that you find.

