

The BIG Ditch

Chapter Two - by Kay Hively

Doug sat on the porch rail and watched two burly men as they loaded boxes and trunks onto the freight wagon in front of the house. Even though Doug was a strong boy and eager to work, his father had told him to stay out of the men's way.

For over a week Doug had watched his mother fill the boxes and trunks that were being hauled out of the house. Mrs. Taylor was only allowed 20 containers for all the clothes and household items she wanted to take to Panama. Everything else was to be left in their home while the family was gone for a year.

Doug had been given one small box to pack with his own things. Choosing what to take was difficult. Finally, he filled the box with a few books, his riding boots, boxing gloves, school banner and his collection of toy soldiers.

When the last trunk was loaded onto the wagon, the two men drove the wagon away toward the docks. Doug slid off the rail as his parents came out onto the porch. Dr. Taylor set two bags on the porch while he locked the front door of the house.

With the house locked up tight, the family walked to the street where a buggy waited. Doug turned for a final look at the house where he had lived all his life. For a moment, he felt homesick. But he reminded himself that the house would be taken care of while the family was gone. And, when they returned next year, things would be back just as they had always been.

Quickly, Doug jumped into the buggy. As the family rode down the street, Doug looked at every house and thought of all the people who lived in them. Once again, he felt sad. But as they moved farther way, he began to think about what adventures lie ahead. He even imagined himself chopping his way through thick jungle and fighting off poisonous snakes and a hungry puma.

His daydreaming ended when the family arrived at the dock. Dr. Taylor stepped out of the buggy and helped his wife onto the ground. As Doug looked up, his father pointed to a large ship and said it was the one that would take them to Panama.

In only a few minutes, the Taylor family was aboard the ship. They quickly put their bags in their stateroom and hurried back on deck to watch the ship pull away from the dock. Doug's father said the trip would take about a week.

As he stood by his parents and clung to the ship's rail, Doug watched the men on the docks and the ship's crew prepare the ship for sailing. The men were yelling and throwing ropes all over the dock. Suddenly there was a loud blast from a big smokestack, and Doug felt the ship begin to move. His first sea voyage was about to begin.

Next Week: Chapter Three - Next Stop: Panama

Author Kay Hively and Illustrator Billie Goforth-Stewart are both of Neosho, Mo. Produced by the Missouri Press Foundation. Copyright 2006.



Things to Think About and Do

- Using a dictionary, find the definition of these words from Chapter 2:
1. burly 2. puma 3. stateroom 4. smokestack 5. voyage. Learn the definitions and how to spell each word.
- The Taylor family is moving from Maryland to Panama. What is the capital of Maryland? What is the capital of Panama? What is the principal language of each capital city?
- Doug and his family will be gone one year. Find an article in the newspaper about something just getting started. Write your own news story, set one year from today, using prediction to tell what has changed or been accomplished.