



Chapter Eight - by Kay Hively

The President of the United States beamed a big smile at Doug, who stood speechless in front of two famous men. Dr. Gorgas reached out to shake hands with Doug. As they clasped hands, Dr. Gorgas told the President that everyone in the hospital knew about this boy who helped sick and dying patients.

Again the President smiled and offered his hand. For a brief moment, Doug Taylor was shaking hands with the President of the United States. When the President and Dr. Gorgas walked away, Doug's knees began to shake so much that he had to sit on a bench for a moment.

Then he picked up his water pail and went on his way to get fresh, cool water for the patients.

That night, as Doug and his father walked home in the rain, they talked about President Roosevelt. Both had seen the President at the hospital. As they walked and talked, Doug felt a great sense of pride for both Panama and his own country, the United States. In every direction they looked they could see dozens of flags from both countries. The flags hung on poles and waved from every porch and rooftop. It was a sight Doug would remember all his life.

That night after supper Doug went to his room and wrote a letter to his friends in Baltimore. He told about meeting President Roosevelt and reported that more and more people were healthy as they all worked to stamp out yellow fever and malaria.

In his letter, Doug also told how he and Mario were becoming good boxers. He said they also got to ride horses through the jungle or along the beach. Doug told his friends that he would be back in Baltimore in about six months and he was eager for a game of stickball.

The months in Panama went fast. Doug kept busy going to school, playing with Mario and his other friends and working at the hospital. Each night when he went to bed, Doug could hardly sleep because he was so excited about what might happen the next day. Every day was a time of great adventure – even when it rained.

Finally, the time came for the Taylor family to go home. Doug was excited, but he was also sad to leave Maria and Mario and his friends at the school and the hospital. As he had done a year before, Doug packed a box with his things and said good-bye to his friends.

Then, early one morning Doug rode on the little Panama Railroad back to Colon where he and his family boarded a steamship for their return to America. All along the way he could see that more and more progress was being made on the Big Ditch. One day, Doug knew, he would return and ride a ship through the Panama Canal.

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

- Doug got to meet President Theodore Roosevelt. Find out when Mr. Roosevelt served as President. How old was Mr. Roosevelt when he became President? What other high positions did he hold? Write a short biography of Theodore Roosevelt. Share your story with an adult.
- Doug was happy in Panama. Why do you think he looked forward to every day? There is much rain in Panama. Find out the average annual rainfall in Panama City. What is the average annual rainfall in your town?
- Research the Panamal Canal to learn more about it. Why was it built? How is it used? Often books have "afterwards," giving readers more information. Write your own afterward to "The Big Ditch" and share it with your classmates.