

the Christmas tree

Chapter Two by Kay Hively

By nightfall, the weather had turned very cold. Mr. Drake said it was too early for snow, but he started a fire in the big black stove. Mrs. Drake hung Mary Jo's nightgown and Mac's and Morey's night shirts on the back of a chair beside the stove.

After dark, the family sat around the stove and talked. The boys talked about how much cotton they would pick, and how much money they would make.

Mrs. Drake reminded everyone to put on the old clothes she would lay out for them in the morning. The pants had patches, she said, but they were good enough for work in the fields.

Mr. Drake told his children to get a good night's sleep. There was a lot of work to do, he said. If they wanted the cotton picked before Christmas, everyone would have to work hard.

As she sat by the stove, Mary Jo thought about her Christmas tree. She asked her father if their well would run dry. He said the well was low and everyone should be extra careful. He said no water could be wasted. It should only be used for drinking, washing dishes, bathing and for the animals.

Mr. Drake did not say anything about water for a Christmas tree.

The warm nightgown felt good to Mary Jo as she got into bed. As the only girl, she had a room by herself. Her room was small, but she was happy there. She had a bed, a chest for her clothes, a chair, a mirror and a table. From the window by her bed, she could see the back yard and the cotton fields off in the distance.

Mary Jo also could see the little Christmas tree. For more than two years she had watched it from her window.

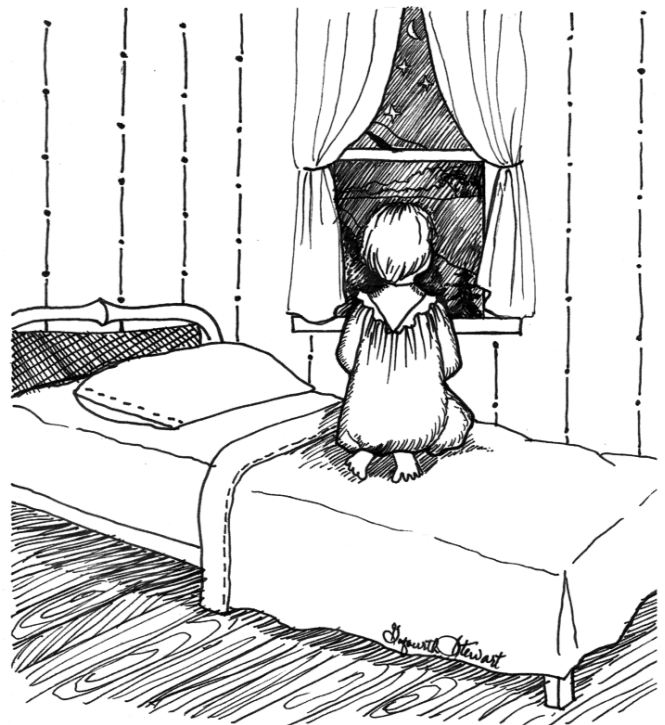
She remembered the day Mr. Brady gave it to her. He had come to help her father learn how to keep the soil from blowing away on their farm. The two men had planted grass and three rows of trees.

When Mr. Brady came with a bundle of trees for her father, he had one special tree. It was a tiny Christmas tree. Mr. Brady gave it to Mary Jo and told her how to plant and take care of it. Because it was so small, he said it would need lots of water. Without water it would die.

Mary Jo had faithfully watered her tree and it had grown fast. When she first planted it, she could step over it. Now it reached all the way to her chin. It was big enough to be a Christmas tree.

It was too dark to see the little tree now, but Mary Jo looked out her window and hoped it could hang on another month. She knew that water was more important for drinking and taking care of the animals than it was for saving her Christmas tree.

From now on, the little tree was on its own.



Author Kay Hively and Illustrator Billie Gofourth-Stewart are both of Neosho, Missouri. Produced in partnership with this newspaper and the Missouri Press Foundation with support from Verizon Foundation. Copyright 2002.

Classroom Extensions

Things to Think About and Do –

- If you had to save water at your house, list three things you could do. Write a short essay telling why everyone should conserve water even if there seems to be plenty.
- How do grass and trees help keep soil from blowing away on the Drake farm? What is the definition of “drought?”

Show Me Standards Correlations – G1:2,5; G4:5; CA2; H/PE7; S8

Next Week: Chapter Three – Picking Cotton