



Chapter Five — by Russ and Kay Hively

Uncle Chuck brought his hand out from behind his back and handed Larry a baseball. He said he had caught the ball at an Indians game before he went into the Army. It was a pop foul hit by Ken “Butch” Kelter in a 1941 game against the Philadelphia Athletics.

Uncle Chuck said that if the boys needed it, they could use the ball for their games.

Larry was stunned. All he could do was stare at the ball. He had never held a big league baseball before, and now he actually had one of his own. He tried to imagine who might have played with this ball. He wondered if his favorite player, Bob Feller, had thrown this ball during the game. Larry gave his uncle a giant hug and said thanks. Uncle Chuck told him to put the ball away for now so it wouldn't get lost.

Larry hurried into the house and set the ball in a place of honor on the dresser in his room. It was the finest gift he had ever gotten.

Later that afternoon Larry and Uncle Chuck went to the open lot for the afternoon game. When they got to the baseball field, Mr. Williams was coming out to sit on his porch. Uncle Chuck walked over to meet the old man. Larry saw the two men sit down in the porch swing to watch the game.

The boys divided up into teams and flipped a pop bottle cap to see who would start in the field and who would be the first to bat.

Larry's pitching had been good, and by the fourth inning his team was up by two runs. But while his team was at bat, the boys heard a whistle and a freight train rumbled down the track.

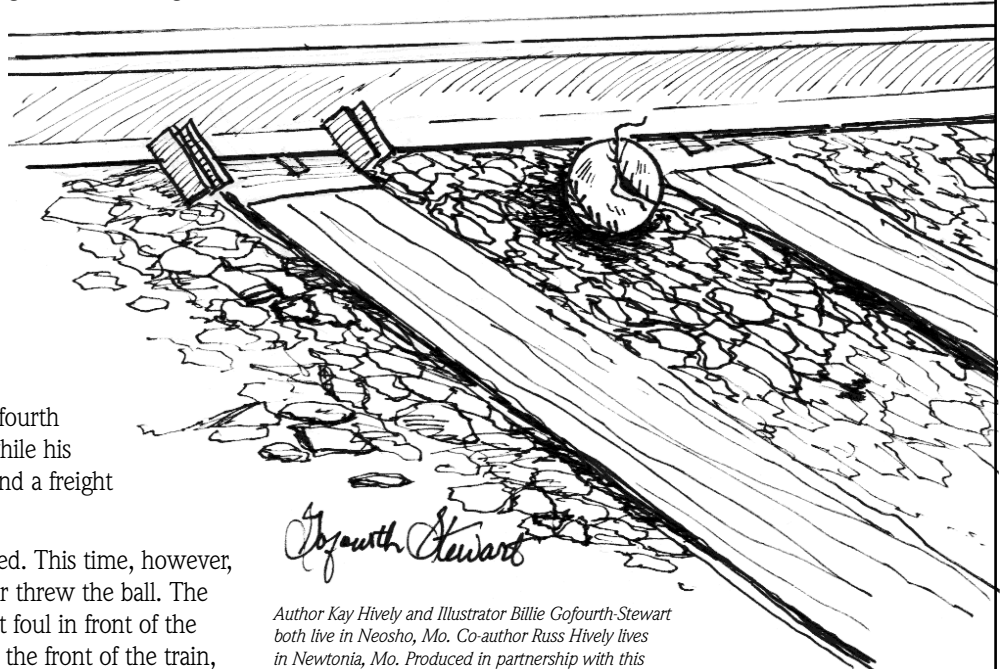
Usually, the game stopped until a train passed. This time, however, the batter stayed at the plate and the pitcher threw the ball. The hitter connected with the ball and popped it foul in front of the oncoming train. The ball bounced once, hit the front of the train,

and rolled down the track. The boys could only watch as the ball bounced several times under the train.

Once the train passed, the left fielder found the ball between the rails. The fielder threw the ball to the pitcher. Larry could see that the ball had been damaged. All the boys ran to the pitcher's spot for a look. The pitcher laid the ball in his glove. There was a huge gash on one side and the binding string was already beginning to unwind.

Several boys had old or damaged balls like the one that just collided with the train. They played with the old balls at home, but no one had a ball that was in good condition.

Then Larry thought about the ball Uncle Chuck had just given him. He did not want to give it up. As he stood thinking about what to do, Larry could see the ball laying on his dresser at home.



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Learning Extensions — Things to Think About and Do

A. The boys used a pop bottle cap before the game. What is a pop bottle cap? Are they still used? Why is food sealed in containers like cans and bottles?

B. Find out the following about a baseball. How much does it weigh? What size is it? What is it made of? What shape are the cover pieces?