



An Old Secret



Chapter Seven - by Russ and Kay Hively

Joe woke up earlier than normal and got dressed for work. Sunday was a day of rest at the Porters, but the animals had to be taken care of. When the chores were finished, the family ate breakfast and packed a lunch for the picnic after church.

Mamma was feeling good and was eager to leave the house. Grant loaded their baseball gloves and bat onto the truck. Everyone dressed in their best clothes for church, and the boys bundled up some clothes to wear during the ballgame.

On the ride into town Joe kept thinking about the talk he was planning to have with Mr. Wardlaw. Sunday School and church seemed to move slowly for Joe. He normally liked Sunday School, but he had lots of things on his mind. During the church service he watched Mr. Wardlaw sitting in his pew and wondered if the older man could tell him about the strange things happening to the Porter family.

After church everyone went to the ballpark to eat. Joe looked for Mr. Wardlaw but could not find him. Even when lunch was over and the ballgame started, Mr. Wardlaw was nowhere to be found. Joe was getting nervous. This was his one chance to talk to the town grocer alone, and he couldn't find him.

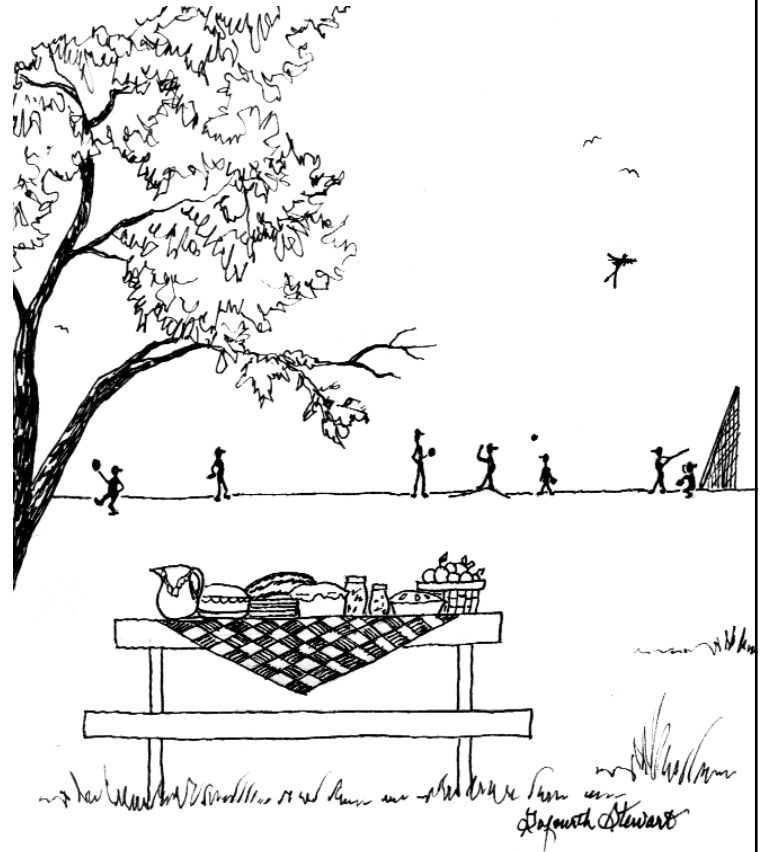
In the middle of the fourth inning Joe spotted Mr. Wardlaw carrying a campstool along the third base line. Making his way around behind home plate, Joe walked up to the man and tapped him on the shoulder. Mr. Wardlaw turned around and flashed a huge smile when he saw Joe. He asked Joe how he and his family were getting along.

Joe was horribly nervous. The moment he had been thinking about for two days was here. He gave short, quick answers to the older man's questions. Then after a few minutes, Mr. Wardlaw realized Joe was not himself. Quietly, Mr. Wardlaw leaned over to Joe and asked if everything was all right. Joe told him he wanted to talk in private.

With the campstool in his hand, Mr. Wardlaw followed Joe a little farther away from the ballgame. Mr. Wardlaw had a concerned look on his face when they stopped. Then Joe told the older man about all the strange things that had been happening at their farm: the box of groceries on the back porch, the truck moved and loaded with watermelons, and the gas tank being filled overnight.

Then Joe looked at Mr. Wardlaw and asked him if he knew who bought the groceries. Mr. Wardlaw looked down at Joe. The boy

could see the older man was thinking about what he was going to say. Finally, Mr. Wardlaw let out a big sigh, and looking at Joe, said it was about time he told someone an old secret.



Author Kay Hively and Illustrator Billie Gofourth-Stewart are both of Neosho, Mo. Russ Hively lives in Newtonia, Mo. Produced by the Missouri Press Foundation. Copyright 2006.

Things to Think About and Do

- The Porter's packed a lunch for after church. Some foods must be kept cool to be eaten safely. Make a list of foods that should always remain refrigerated.
- Mr. Wardlaw could see something was bothering Joe. Make a list of things that people do to communicate to others that do not involve speaking.

Next Week: Chapter Eight – The secret.