



Chapter Four – by Kay Hively

All day long, the big black dog stayed with the Herman family.

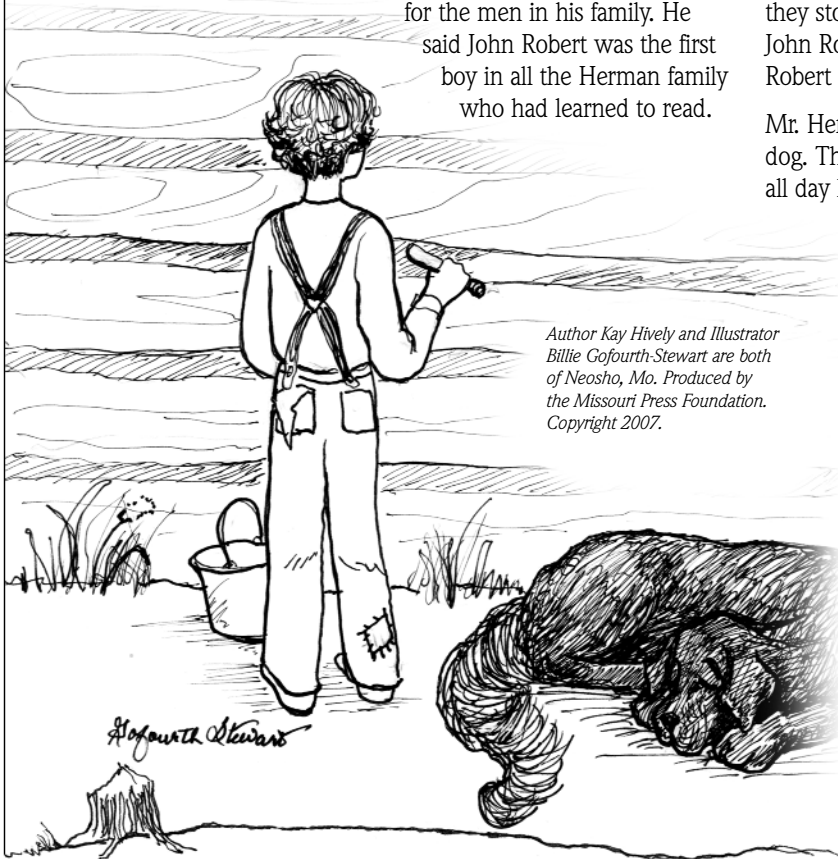
Now that the stumps were gone from the clearing, John Robert and his father worked around the house and barn. The cold wind that had come in the night stayed on through the entire day.

Mr. Herman said it was time to get everything ready for winter.

New mud was needed to fill the chinks in the little barn. Over the last year, the mud between the logs had dried up and fallen out, making big cracks in the barn. Before winter, those cracks had to be filled to keep out the cold winds.

John Robert had trouble making mud that was sticky enough. Usually he added too much water to his clay. This made the mud run down the outside of the barn. Finally, Mr. Herman mixed a batch of mud to show John Robert just how to make it thin enough to spread yet thick enough to stay in place.

As they worked to make good mud, John Robert said he wished he was as smart as his father. Mr. Herman smiled and said he wished he could read like his son. He said that reading was a new frontier for the men in his family. He said John Robert was the first boy in all the Herman family who had learned to read.



Author Kay Hively and Illustrator Billie Gofourth-Stewart are both of Neosho, Mo. Produced by the Missouri Press Foundation. Copyright 2007.

John Robert had never thought of reading as a frontier. Then Mr. Herman explained that a frontier can be many things. He said it could be a piece of land where only a few people live, or it can be something like reading, when not many others are able to do so.

Going where others have not gone, Mr. Herman said, is being on a frontier.

Finally after help from his father, John Robert was making good mud. As the boy worked on the barn, the big black dog rested nearby, mostly sleeping. When John Robert looked at the dog, he wondered where it had come from. There was a good trail nearby that was used by travelers coming through the territory. John Robert decided the dog had wandered off the trail and was left behind by its master.

But Mr. Herman said any good dog could catch up to its master even if it got two or three days behind. John Robert's father agreed that the appearance of the dog was a puzzle.

As the day passed, the boy and the dog became friends. When they stood side by side, the dog's head came all the way up to John Robert's shoulder. The big dog stood quietly when John Robert petted it.

Mr. Herman asked John Robert what he was going to name the dog. That was a question that had been on John Robert's mind all day long. Just what would be a good name?

Things to Think About and Do

- John Robert is helping chink the barn. Using a dictionary, learn the definition of the word "chink." As an art project, make a little cabin or barn out of sticks and chink the sticks together with mud. Have a display of cabins made by members of your class.
- Mr. Herman told his definition of the word "frontier." What U.S. state is sometimes called "the last frontier?" What television show calls outer space "the final frontier?" What historical character has been called the "king of the wild frontier?"
- Look in your newspaper for things that would be considered a "new frontier."

Next Week: Chapter Five – A big name