



Chapter Five – by Kay Hively

The next morning, John Robert could see through the cabin window that the big dog was still outside. After a night's sleep, John Robert had decided to name the dog Hercules.

Last winter Mrs. Herman had read to her family about the Greek gods and other mythical characters. Hercules was known for his strength and courage. As John Robert thought about the name, he could tell by the dog's great size that he would be full of strength.

As the family ate breakfast, John Robert announced the name to his parents. They were very pleased. Mrs. Herman was proud that John Robert remembered the stories she read to him. Mr. Herman hoped that Hercules would not only have strength, but would have courage as well. Courage, he said, was very important on the Tennessee frontier.

After breakfast, John Robert and his father took table scraps to feed to the dog. John Robert cupped his hands around his mouth and called to Hercules. The big dog did not move. He just turned his head and looked at John Robert. The boy called the dog's name again, but the animal still did not move.

Mr. Herman told John Robert to take the food to the dog and stay with him while he ate. Mr. Herman also told his son to pet the dog and use the name Hercules several times. In time, the older man said, the dog would learn his name.

When John Robert put the food on the ground, the big dog began to eat. John Robert stroked the dog's fur and called his name over and over. John Robert could feel strong muscles under the beautiful black fur and he found scars on the dog's face and left side. John Robert also noticed that Hercules was missing part of one foot. But, in spite of his scars, the big dog was impressive to look at. John Robert was happy to have a dog.

As the days passed, the Herman family worked to prepare for winter. Hercules helped in many ways. He herded the milk cows, and many times he chased away wild animals that came to steal chickens or pigs from the barn. Hercules was a wonderful watchdog and a big help on the farm. He wasn't afraid of anything. John Robert and his father agreed that Hercules was truly strong and courageous.

The days passed quickly, and everyone was thinking about Christmas. John Robert had been secretly making gifts for his parents. Using scrap wood, he had built a milk stool for his father, and he made a little bench for his mother. She needed something to use in front of the fireplace when she was cooking there.

On Christmas Eve, when he went to bed, John Robert was excited. Tomorrow he would be able to give his parents their gifts, and he wondered what they might have for him.



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

Things to Think About and Do

- Hercules was a character from Greek mythology. Make a list of five major Greek mythological characters and write a short paragraph about each.
- John Robert made a milk stool to give his father for Christmas. What is a milk stool? Using some skill you have, make something that you could give as a gift.
- Gifts come in different forms. Look through your newspaper and find 10 gifts.

Next Week: Chapter Five – A wonderful day!