



Chapter Six – by Kay Hively

Christmas Day was cold and wet. Before the Herman family finished breakfast, a light snow began to fall. But the little cabin was warm and cheerful. John Robert gave his gifts to his parents and made them very proud of how well he had built them.

Mrs. Herman gave her husband and John Robert each a pair of fur-lined mittens. She also gave them warm socks.

Mr. Herman gave his wife some pretty new cloth so she could make a dress. Then he said there was a present for John Robert in the barn. Pulling on his new mittens and his old coat, John Robert went outside with his father. Hercules followed them into the barn.

John Robert could see nothing that looked like a Christmas present.

Mr. Herman took a big wooden fork and dug into a stack of hay. Soon, he reached into the hay and pulled out the present. John Robert's mouth dropped open when he saw the sled.

Mr. Herman said the sled would be perfect in the snow, but he said it was built to be used any time of year. All that was needed was something to pull the sled. Immediately, John Robert thought about Atlas and Jenny, but his father shook his head. Then Mr. Herman said the sled had been made to be pulled by Hercules.

The big dog seemed to understand what Mr. Herman said because he came to stand beside the sled. Mr. Herman said that Hercules had already pulled the sled three times. While John Robert was helping his mother wash clothes in the stream, Mr. Herman had tested the dog and the sled. He said Hercules easily pulled the sled around the farmyard — even with Mr. Herman riding on it. He said the sled could also be used to haul things around the farm.

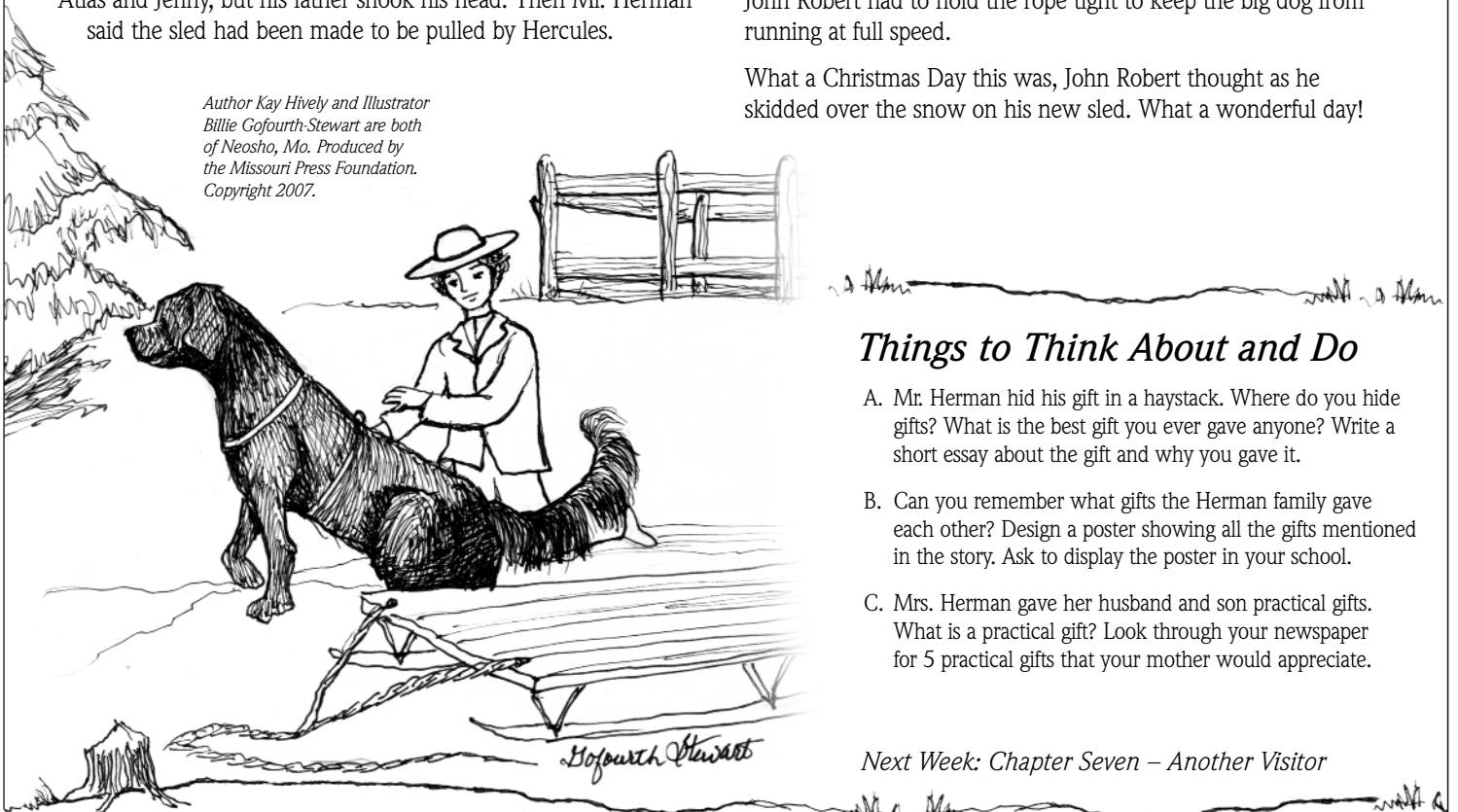
John Robert and his father carried the sled outdoors and set it down in the yard. Mr. Herman showed his son how to attach the rope to a small collar around the broad shoulders of Hercules.

When everything was ready, John Robert sat down on the sled, braced his feet, and took the rope in his hands. Then the boy spoke to Hercules and the big dog began walking across the yard, easily pulling the sled through the little layer of snow on the ground. Soon John Robert was able to guide the dog from one side to the other. In no time at all, the boy and the dog formed a great team.

For an hour John Robert rode around the yard. He had a wonderful time riding the sled. Hercules was so happy pulling the sled that John Robert had to hold the rope tight to keep the big dog from running at full speed.

What a Christmas Day this was, John Robert thought as he skidded over the snow on his new sled. What a wonderful day!

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

- Mr. Herman hid his gift in a haystack. Where do you hide gifts? What is the best gift you ever gave anyone? Write a short essay about the gift and why you gave it.
- Can you remember what gifts the Herman family gave each other? Design a poster showing all the gifts mentioned in the story. Ask to display the poster in your school.
- Mrs. Herman gave her husband and son practical gifts. What is a practical gift? Look through your newspaper for 5 practical gifts that your mother would appreciate.

Next Week: Chapter Seven – Another Visitor