

Ode to Joy



Chapter Three – by Kay Hively

The first few days of the Palmer family's life at the trading post were very busy. Pa spent much of his time learning to run the business. His helper was Thomas, who had worked at the post since he was a young boy. Pa and Thomas got along just fine and Alice thought they made a good team. Alice spent many hours in the trading post, watching her father work and meeting the people who came there. Travelers on the road stopped to buy gasoline for their cars and to buy things at the trading post. But the most interesting people who came to the trading post were members of the Navajo tribe.

The Navajos came to buy supplies or to sell their blankets, pottery and jewelry to Pa. Many times, entire families would come together. Alice wanted to talk to the children, but they were usually very shy. Thomas said most of the Navajo could speak English, but many preferred to speak their native language.

Early one morning Thomas asked Mother if she and Alice would like to visit a woman who was the best weaver in the tribe. Alice was eager to watch someone weave a blanket. Maybe, she thought, she and her mother could learn to make blankets, too.

Thomas said the blanket maker they were going to see was his mother who lived only about one mile from the trading post. Mrs. Palmer and Alice enjoyed hiking so they were happy to go with Thomas. All along the way, Thomas led them down small paths, over little mounds of sand and even down along a small stream. Alice and Mother thought the countryside was beautiful.

After about a half hour of walking, Thomas led them up to a small domed hut. He said this was a hogan, the kind of house used by many Navajo families. Thomas led Alice and Mother around the hogan where there was a small shelter that was like a little porch. The roof of the shelter was made of grasses, leaves and twigs. The shelter had no sides.

Under the shelter, Alice saw an old woman sitting cross-legged on the ground. In front of her was a tall wooden frame where she was making a blanket.

Thomas introduced Alice and Mrs. Palmer to his mother. He said her name was Helen. The older woman smiled and gestured for them to sit on the ground beside her. No one spoke as Helen moved her hands back and forth, weaving more strands of wool into the blanket she was making.

Mother and Alice watched closely, trying to figure out how it was all done. As she sat watching the woman's hands, Alice

heard a faint noise behind her. Turning her head back toward the hogan, she saw a strange face peering around the edge of the house.



Author Kay Hively and Illustrator Billie Gofourth-Stewart are both of Neosho, Missouri.
Copyright 2005, Missouri Press Foundation.

Things to Think About and Do

- It took a half-hour for Alice to walk to Helen's house. Do you walk or do any other exercise each day? How far can you walk in half an hour? Name five other kinds of exercise besides walking?
- Find a picture of a hogan. What materials are used to make a hogan. Gather similar materials and make a hogan as an art project. Teach your classmates how to make one and then have everyone make a hogan to create an Indian village.

Next Week: Chapter Four – A Real Doll