

The BIG Ditch

Chapter Four – by Kay Hively

Doug stood on the deck with his father watching the ship dock in Panama. The wharf was a busy place. Doug wiped sweat from his forehead as his father loosened his necktie. The heat rising up to the ship's rail was intense.

Finally, the Taylor family left the ship. Dr. Taylor made arrangements for transportation to a depot not far away. The two-hour ride to Panama City was made through miles of jungle that crowded right up to the side of the train. Dr. Taylor said the jungle was so thick that if the train missed its run from Colon to Panama City for one day, vines overran parts of the tracks. He said tropical heat and moisture made plants grow very fast.

Doug stared out the window, hoping to see the canal that was being dug. Most of the time, however, the jungle was so thick that Doug could see nothing but trees and plants. He did see beautiful birds with bright red, green, and yellow feathers. The birds floated like balloons from tree to tree.

When the train reached the city of Panama, the Taylor family gathered around the big pile of baggage. As they picked out their trunks and bags, a small man in a wagon stopped at the station and called to Dr. Taylor. The man said he had been sent to take them to Ancon.

The streets of Panama were busy with people and wagons. The town was not like anything Doug had ever seen. The streets were dirty and noisy, and everyone was speaking Spanish.

With the bags loaded, Doug and his parents climbed into the wagon and began their short journey to the hospital where Dr. Taylor would work with the famous Dr. Gorgas. As he rode along in the wagon, Doug could hardly take in all the activity.

Men, machinery and animals seemed to be going and coming from every direction.

In only a short time the man driving the wagon turned and started up a high hill. Doug and his parents held tight to the sides of the wagon box. The driver looked at Dr. Taylor and pointed up the hill, saying the hospital was on the top.

When the wagon topped the hill, Doug could feel cool air, and the area on the hill was much more clean and sanitary than what he had seen in Panama City. The wagon stopped in front of a long set of steps. Doug's eyes followed the path of the steps up to a very large two-story building that had porches all the way around on both the first and second floors.

Doug was amazed at everything around him. It was a world like he had never seen before.

Here, on this hilltop, would be his home for the next year. Somehow, he had a feeling it was going to be an interesting year.

Next Week: Chapter Five – Good Health

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Things to Think About and Do

- Panama has beautiful tropical birds. Find a bird identification book and identify 10 different bird species that live in Panama. Draw and color one of the birds.
- Why do you think it was cooler on top of the hill where Doug will live than it was in Panama City? On a map of Panama, see if you can find the three cities that were mentioned in this chapter.
- As Doug and his family arrive in Panama, they discover the sights and sounds of the area. Look through the newspaper and make a collage of words and pictures that would describe your community to a newcomer.

