

THE RIVER SPEAKS

CHAPTER 2 - BY KAY HIVELY

The sun was just rising when Mr. Johnston took Toby and his father to the river in his wagon. Before he left, Mr. Johnston said he and his family would watch after Toby's mother and his two brothers. Mr. LePage thanked his neighbor for the ride and for watching over the family.

Mr. Johnston's wagon was barely out of sight when Toby heard a steam whistle. A chill bolted down his back. He was about to get his first ride on a steamboat.

In no time at all, the *Arabia* pulled up near shore. Toby, his father and the boat's crew began loading firewood. Some of the passengers even helped, and before noon, the job was done.

Once on board, Toby stood beside his father as the boat

began moving upstream. When the boat first moved, Toby nearly lost his footing. His father laughed and said he needed some sea legs.

As the boat moved into the middle of the river, a cabin boy approached Toby and his father. He introduced himself as Mike and said he would show them where they would sleep.

Mr. LePage carried their satchel as he and Toby followed Mike to a small room where two beds were nailed on the walls. There was no furniture, just the two beds. Toby's father put the satchel under one of the bunks. Then Mike said he would take them to meet the captain.

As he walked on the boat, Toby held onto anything he could find to keep from falling.

Carefully, he followed Mike and his father to the wheelhouse.

Mr. LePage and the captain talked like they had been friends for years. But Toby was overwhelmed and timid. The captain said they had 220 tons of cargo to take upriver to frontier trading posts.

As Toby listened, he never thought he would get to ride on a steamboat, and he sure never thought he would meet a real captain. Riverboat captains were heroes, and most every boy dreamed of being a river pilot.

Finally, as Toby stood quietly beside his father, Captain Bill turned and looked at him. The captain smiled and welcomed him on board. All Toby could do was say thanks.

Then, with the cabin boy in the lead, father and son made their way down to the

boiler where two men were throwing wood into the fire.

Mike told Toby and his father their job was to carry wood from the deck to the boiler. He said if the fire went out, there would be no steam and the boat would be grounded. The job was very important, Mike said, but he also said there would be time to enjoy the ride and explore the ship.

Toby knew he could do the job since he worked with firewood every day.

In fact, he was eager to go to work, and he was ready for his first riverboat ride.

NEXT WEEK: CHAPTER 3 - RIVERBOAT CHARACTERS

Things to Think About and Do

1. Mr. LePage said Toby needed to get some "sea legs." What are "sea legs," and how do you get them?
2. The *ARABIA* carried 220 tons of cargo. How many pounds is that? How many kilograms is that?
3. Toby said riverboat captains are heroes. What is a hero? In your newspaper, look for pictures and stories about people who you consider heroes today. Write about what makes them heroes.

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