



They Cried on the Trail

Chapter 2

By Carolyn Estes

Many moons passed while the Indians were held in the Tennessee compound. Finally, John and his family were moved to the Cherokee Agency near Rattlesnake Springs.

Some Cherokee families were assigned to travel on the water route with Principal Chief John Ross. John's family was one of those left behind. They would travel west by land.

One cold, wet October morning government wagons arrived. The 645 wagons would move the Cherokees west.

"Hey, boy! Come help me load the blankets and food on the wagon," a guide yelled to John.

"Is this the wagon we'll ride on?" John asked.

"No, you are too old to ride and your parents are young enough to walk. Only the old and sick and some very young children will ride," the guide said. "Now get busy, there is no time to talk."

With only a few clothes and little else John and his family walked beside the wagon as thousands of Cherokees started west. The line of wagons and Indians stretched for several miles.

"Father, my feet are cold and wet," John said. "How far do we have to walk?"

"The guard said the trail would be many, many miles and would take until summer," his father answered.

"You mean we are going to walk for many months? We can't walk all winter, can we?" asked John.

"You have to be a strong Cherokee brave now. Keep up, John. Just keep walking!" his father ordered.

Day after day, John walked behind the wagon. One morning he noticed a girl sitting beside the trail with her head in her hands. He knelt down beside her to see if she was okay.

"Why are you crying?" he asked.

"My mother died last night. She got very sick after walking so long in the cold. The guide told me to keep walking today," she said.

"My dad died before we left on the trail so now I have no one," she cried. "What am I going to do?"

"Come with me. I'll ask my parents what you should do," John told her.

They caught up with his parents and John told them her story. His mother took the girl in her arms and dried her tears.

"You will stay with us and we will watch over you," John's father said. "Now what is your name?"

"My name is Salali," the young girl said.

"Oh," said John. "That means 'squirrel' in our native language."

"But everyone in our tribe called me Sally," she said.

About the story

This is an eight-chapter fiction story about two Indian children based on the history of the Trail of Tears. The names of the children are made up. The story is not based on any real family. Watch for another chapter in next week's newspaper.