



They Cried on the Trail

Chapter 3
By Carolyn Estes

Several weeks passed. Each week was colder than the one before. The travelers found the winter-like conditions very hard to deal with. Many were sick and had used up all the herbs they brought with them.

John's mother started to cough and was having trouble breathing. His dad sought out a wise woman who knew about herbs. He asked her to help him.

"I'm sorry, I have been looking for herbs along the trail so I could help our people who are sick, but I don't know the plants I'm seeing," she said. "None of them look like the ones back in Georgia. If I use the wrong herb, I could do more harm than good."

John's mother continued to get worse. Sally took over making the evening meal and looking after her. During the day a bed was made in a wagon for her, but she continued to get worse.

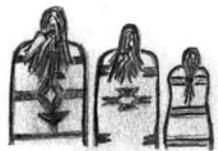
One cold evening John helped his father build the campfire while Sally tried to find enough food for the family.

"John, your mother is very sick. I think we should stay here and try to get her well," his dad said.

"But what if we stay and no other wagons come?" John asked.

"There are many more behind us. We'll be okay," his dad reassured him.

And so it was decided. The family would stay by the trail while John's mother tried to recover. They were given a few extra blankets and some food from the wagon.



The next day John and his father found brush to build a small shelter to block the cold wind. They built it next to the campfire so some of the heat from the fire would keep the shelter warm. As John tried to fall asleep, he heard his father coughing.

On Nov. 17, John woke up to snow falling on the shelter. The fire had gone out. Sally was holding his mother's hand. Tears were streaming down her face.

"John, I think your mother is dying. Get your father," said Sally.

John called to his father, who was gathering brush to build a fire. As the three knelt down beside John's mother she took her last breath.

John's father wrapped her in a warm blanket and carried her into the woods nearby. John found a strong stick and dug away as much dirt as he could by a tall tree. They placed her in the grave and said a prayer.

The next morning they joined the others on the trail.

About the story

This is an eight-chapter fiction story about two Indian children. It is 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.