

JOHN MUIR AND THE WELL

A play

By Carole L. Cooney

Setting: The Muir living room in Scotland, farmland in Wisconsin

Characters:

Narrator

Father

John

David

“The Yankee,” a neighbor

Mother

Narrator: John Muir is known as the Founder of Yosemite Park and the Sierra Club, and the first American environmentalist. The adventures he had as a boy developed his love of nature and the work he would eventually accomplish.

Our story begins one night as John’s father gathered the family in the living room to make an important announcement.

Father: Mother, children, in a few days, Sarah, John and David will sail with me to America.

John: (jumping up and down) America! America! I’m going to America!

Father: (sternly) John! Sit down and be quiet! Mother and your young brothers and sister will stay at home in Scotland until we have made a suitable place for our family to live.

Narrator: A week later, John boarded a huge ship for the long, six week voyage to America. Soon, Father bought a hundred acres of farmland in the state of Wisconsin. It was there that the hard work of clearing the land and building a house began.

John: (very excited) David, our neighbor, “The Yankee,” taught me how to burn the bushes, drag old logs and clear the land. Tomorrow he said he would show me how to plough the field.

David: I don’t know how you can work so hard all day long. I do what I can, but I get so tired. How do you do it, John?

John: David, you know how strict Father is about preparing for Mother and the children. It’s best to keep him happy by working hard. Stay with me because very soon “The Yankee” is going to show me how to split wood and make fences. I know you’ll be able to help me.

Narrator: Once the land was cleared, ploughed and fenced, Sarah and John began to plant wheat, corn and potatoes. They loved chatting about their new life in America, but Father was not happy about their talking while working. He put a stop to it by having them work at opposite ends of the field. Then one day, Father gathered the children.

Father: Sarah, John, David! You have all worked very hard. Now we are ready to send for Mother and your brothers and sister. Let us kneel and pray to God for their safe trip.

Narrator: The day of the arrival came and the family was together once again.

Mother: Dear Father, Sarah, John and David, you have certainly made a wonderful home for our family.

Father: Thank you, Mother. But! there is just one thing missing. Water! We must dig for water. John, since you are the strongest, you will start digging early tomorrow morning.

John: Yes, Father!

David: How deep must the well be, Father?

Father: I'm not exactly sure, but most likely 50 feet should do.

Narrator: For months, John worked on the well by chipping away at the hard sandstone with a hammer and chisel. As the hole became deep, he was lowered in a bucket. David lowered another bucket to collect the loosened dirt which was emptied and returned down the hole. It was very slow work and went on day after day. One morning, John shouted to his brother.

John: (shouting) David! I'm about 50 feet down and there's no water. Ask Father what I'm supposed to do.

Father: (sternly) John, you *know what to do*. We need water! Keep digging until you find it!

Narrator: A few weeks later, David ran from the hole and screamed for Father's help.

David: Father! Father! There is something wrong with John! I've called and called to him but there is no answer. Father! Come quickly!

Father: Sarah, run and get "The Yankee". He will know what to do.

Narrator: "The Yankee" had warned Mr. Muir about "choke damp" which was an acid found in the deep underground. He ran to the well carrying a bucket of water and tossed it down the hole. The water splashed on John's face as he heard voices above.

"The Yankee": (shouting) Get into the bucket, John!

Father: (roaring) GET INTO THE BUCKET!

Narrator: John slowly crept into the bucket. Quickly, David pulled up the bucket. John lay unconscious on the ground but... he was alive!

Mother: Oh, John! You had us so worried! Lean on my shoulder while I put you to bed.

Narrator: Only two days later, John's father sent him back into the well shaft. This time "The Yankee" said to throw water down first to get rid of any gasses. Once again, David lowered John 80 feet into the deep, dark well.

John: (very determined) I know I can do it! I JUST HAVE TO KEEP DIGGING!

Narrator: With a mighty swing, John's chisel hit the side wall. Suddenly it begins to crumble. A little trickle of water seeped through and then a watery gush covered the well's floor.

John: (shouting) I DID IT! THERE'S WATER! DAVID! THERE'S WATER!

Narrator: John danced and splashed and shouted as David pulled up the bucket. John leapt out of the bucket, threw his arms around David, jumping up and down for joy. Father and Mother came out of the house to see what the commotion was about.

Father: (Angrily) John! David! Why have you stopped working? What is the meaning of this nonsense?

David: (shyly) Oh!... Father, John ...has... found... water.

Father: (Seriously) Good. I knew it could be found. John, David, kneel down and thank God for his mercy and for letting us find water.

Narrator: John and David may not have been thanked for the months and months of their hard labor trying to find water, but their father did give the boys one fine gift: a two-year-old Indian pony.