

Marta felt lonely as she sat on the front porch steps. Her family had moved to a new city, and she was missing her old friends. She stared at the kids playing in the yard across the street. Marta was timid and shy, so making new friends was difficult.

Marta's mother came outside and sat on the edge of the steps beside her daughter. "Why are you so gloomy?" she gently asked.

"I miss my old friends, and the kids across the street are having so much fun," replied the girl.

"They look friendly, and they're about your age. Since you know how to play hopscotch, you might ask to join them," encouraged her mother.

Marta whispered, "I'm afraid they won't let me play."

"You'll never know if you don't try. I'll wait here while you walk over to them. Please be careful while crossing the street. Remember to look both ways," Marta's mother said lovingly.

Marta checked for oncoming cars in each direction before crossing the road. She quietly went over to where the children were playing hopscotch. They welcomed her and asked if she would like to join them. Marta smiled and waved to her mother.

It was a sunny day, and Jerome was sick with the flu. Feeling sorry for himself, he sat on the couch. He looked out the window at his backyard swing set. It wasn't exactly the swings that were on his mind. Today was circus day, and he couldn't go. He was terribly disappointed. He would miss watching the trapeze act. While playing on his swing, Jerome often imagined he was a famous trapeze artist swinging high above the crowd.

He decided to rest by taking a short nap. When he woke up, the room had become very dark. The outside windowpane had been magically covered by a piece of cloth! "What in the world happened?" he wondered.

Slowly, two friends pulled the cloth open like curtains on a stage. Out of his window, Jerome saw more friends. They were swinging, running, and jumping around his yard. They had decided if Jerome couldn't go to the circus, the show would come to him.

They played catch with large hoops and walked along the top edge of a brick wall pretending it was a high wire act. His friends looked so ridiculous! Jerome curled over and roared with laughter. He felt better now. Jerome thought it was wonderful to have such good friends.

As Grandmother sat on her covered porch, she watched the cows come in from the meadow. She had many fond memories of her childhood. She remembered when she was a young milkmaid. Grandmother had milked cows by hand. She loved the animals' steamy breath on cold, winter mornings and the smell of straw and hay. She was happiest feeding the calves milk from buckets.

She remembered every year her father and mother drove to the hatchery. There they purchased newly hatched baby chicks. The chicks were kept in a warming box. This large, boxy device was kept in the pantry. It was heated with electricity. The chicks were fed finely ground corn and fresh water. When their feathers developed, they were turned loose into the yard. The chickens liked to scratch in the grass and catch bugs.

Each of the four seasons was enjoyable, but spring was best. She looked forward to seeing the crops sprouting in the fields. She thought of running after pink, squealing piglets. It made her laugh out loud.

Grandmother was happy she still lived on the farm. However, country life had changed. Almost everything was automated. She realized machines were useful, and life was easier now. Perhaps some change is good.

Joyce and Ben lived in the city. Their house was one mile west of Uncle Mack's ranch. The children often went with their father to visit when he worked at the ranch. Roaming around the farm and riding ponies were always an adventure. Now they were older and expected to help on weekends.

It did not take long before Joyce and Ben realized farming was very hard work. Uncle Mack's business depended on raising sheep, calves, and crops. To increase his income, he was also a horse trader. He knew almost every horse, colt, and pony in six counties. Most profitable for him was trading ponies. When he acquired a new pony, he would invite the kids for a ride. They tried not to become too attached with each new, adorable horse. They were aware it would soon be sold or traded.

One day they fell in love with a wonderful, little, brown and white spotted pony. It had a golden, flowing mane and tail. Secretly, they named him Scout. They were disappointed one Saturday afternoon when they rode their bicycles to the ranch. Scout was nowhere to be found. They turned and asked where the pony was. Uncle Mack smiled and answered, "You mean Scout? He is at the feed store being fitted for a new saddle." Scout was theirs to keep.

Lin and Vern lay stretched out on the grass. They were friends. They liked to watch clouds floating across the blue sky. They enjoyed the endless, changing shapes. The boys imagined they saw bears, ocean liners, angels, and people with funny faces. They thought the thunderhead cloud they saw on the horizon was a giant, snow-covered mountain.

The friends talked about what they had seen. They wanted to learn more about storms and clouds. So, they went to the city library. There they learned some interesting new facts. Different cloud shapes have names. Many storms are seasonal. For example, tornadoes usually occur in springtime. These funnel clouds look like huge coils. This violent storm slashes across the land. It causes serious damage to buildings in its path.

The curious boys often had lively talks. They wanted to know why a hurricane has a calm center eye. Why are tornadoes so powerful?

Both kinds of storms spin in a circular pattern. The boys wondered if the two storms had other things in common.

Each of them enjoyed predicting the weather. Every morning they watched the clouds. Would it rain today? It may be no surprise to learn that they became weather forecasters after college.

People tell stories about Big Foot. Some of them believe this beast is real. They say it lives in the deep, mountain forests of the western United States. It is described as being over six feet tall with coarse, human-like hair from head to toe. Big Foot is said to give off a very foul odor.

Some people claim to have heard a loud, bellowing cry when they were camping. Did Big Foot make the noise? Visitors to the area have told friends they saw the hairy beast. Some say they saw it running through the forest. Yet, they didn't tell forest rangers. They were afraid the animal would be captured. Others insist they have photographs of huge footprints that prove its existence.

Most people think Big Foot is an imaginary creature. They say the reports are just plain silliness. They suggest the people who saw the beast were simply mistaken. They failed to report the sightings because it was just their imagination.

What is the truth? Until a live Big Foot or its skeleton is found, the debate will not end. Stories about Big Foot are like tales about the jack-a-lope. Cowboys invented it. It is a cross between a jackrabbit and an antelope. They made it up while sitting around campfires. Could this be how the legend of Big Foot began?

Dawn did not like vegetables! Once, she took an oath claiming she would never try them again. In fact, she disliked vegetables so much she wouldn't feed them to Ming, her pet turtle. She fed Ming the same foods she liked to eat. She even fed her turtle her favorite dessert, blueberry cobbler. Now, Dawn loves vegetables! What happened that made her change her mind?

Ming had become sluggish and slept all the time, refusing to come out of his shell. Dawn didn't know what was wrong. She carried him to her mother and exclaimed, "Ming is sick and won't eat! What's the matter with him?" Her mother immediately knew why Ming didn't feel well. Mother told her to feed him fresh vegetables and assured her Ming would soon feel better.

After several weeks, Ming was the active turtle he had been. Helping Ming get well was much easier than Dawn thought. She had learned how important vegetables were to a healthy diet. They were also quite tasty. Dawn started going to the store with her mother every Friday to buy fresh produce. She enjoyed making salads for her family.

Daylight was just breaking. The sun was beginning to peek over the horizon. Jessie sat quietly in his tree house. He was looking down on his backyard. He noticed that heavy dew had settled on the lawn overnight. Jessie pulled his coat tighter around him. He thought about his class assignment. It was to study animals that had adapted to city life. He had chosen squirrels because of their ability to survive.

Jessie watched as squirrels slowly crept out of their nests. The youngest ones chased each other. They scampered from limb to limb. Older squirrels busily gathered supplies for the winter. The first frost was only a few weeks away. Leaves were turning brilliant, fall colors. Soon snow would cover the ground. Then, it would be too late for the squirrels to hide acorns.

A shadow glided across the treetops. It was a hawk hungrily exploring for food. The bird saw the squirrels in the huge, old, oak tree. The hawk plunged down to pursue a tasty morning meal, but it was too late. The squirrels had already taken cover. They were hiding in their homes. Jessie sighed with relief. He had given many of them names, and he considered them friends.



Everyone called him Gramps. Of course, he wasn't everyone's grandfather. However, he did have nineteen grandchildren. It just seemed natural to call him Gramps. He wanted to buy a new Model T Ford. The car had just been invented. It was the first auto ever offered for sale. He thought he would enjoy taking the children for a ride.

Gramps hurried to the dealership. There was no problem choosing the color. The motor company had told its work crew to paint all of the automobiles black.

With much fanfare, Gramps came chugging home. He proudly honked the car's horn. He rapidly approached the driveway. Just then, he realized he didn't know how to stop! Luckily, the coal wagon was not parked in front of the house. Wildly waving his arms, Gramps went bouncing between his home and the next-door neighbor's house. He narrowly missed them. The skinny car wheels straddled Grandma's row of gooseberry bushes. The car rolled across her garden. It destroyed bunches of tomatoes before crashing through the side of the chicken coop. All the while Gramps was yelling, "Whoa! Whoa! You crazy Tin Lizzy!"

The automobile didn't understand. It kept going. After many huffs and hisses, the engine died. The auto finally came to a stop. There it sat covered with tomatoes and dripping with juice. Chickens and feathers were scattered everywhere in the yard.

The girl sat quietly in her tire swing watching her great uncle. She was anxious for him to finish making her a new wooden flute. He was carving on a thin, straight branch. He hollowed out the center of the stick and peeled back the loose bark. As he created the instrument, he retold a story about his childhood.

“Many people did not have jobs in the 1930s. This desperate time was called the Depression,” he said. The girl’s uncle skillfully dug holes along the top of the flute. He sliced one end at an angle and plugged the other end with a wooden peg. He spoke again saying, “Many kids didn’t have warm coats. They wore shoes with holes in the bottoms during icy, cold winters. Times were tough for everyone. To save money, people planted gardens. They gathered nuts and fruit in the woods. Women cooked and stored the food in tightly sealed, sterilized, mason jars.”

“Some people found work with the government. They joined a work force and built bridges, dams, roads, and parks all across the country. Men with families found jobs with local city projects. They dug sewers, laid water pipes, and paved streets.”

The Depression was hard for families. Yet, people were resourceful and worked together. That is how they were able to survive.

Lou was the oldest of three children. He thought he was ready to learn how to budget money. He asked his parents for a weekly allowance. The boy's parents were not very excited about the idea. Lou explained the subject was important. After all, he was ten years old. He wanted to learn how to be responsible.

Lou's parents decided to have a meeting. Family talks usually took place after dinner. The boy helped clear the table. He put away the leftover food. Finally, they were seated. Everyone was ready to discuss the boy's request. To Lou's surprise, the first issue was not about his allowance. Instead, they talked about sharing chores. This had not been part of his plan. He just wanted them to say he could have some spending money, but his parents offered to pay him for doing chores.

His parents listed several jobs. They asked him to choose at least three. He could help carry out the garbage. He might choose to wash the dishes on weekends. Perhaps he'd watch his baby brother when his mother needed help. The other choices were dusting the furniture or sweeping the sidewalks. Lou began to realize that money did not grow on trees. He was going to have to earn his allowance.

Ginny laid a handful of coins on the table. There were quarters, nickels, and pennies. She studied them for a while. Ginny planned to write about the history of money for a school project. She had been doing research at the library. She pulled out her notebook and reread the information.

Long ago, many different items were used for money. This idea amazed Ginny. People in some cultures paid for goods with beads and shells. For instance, brightly colored shells were used in India. Some nations traded with whales' teeth or large stone disks.

She had learned the first metal coins were a mixture of gold and silver. They were made in little, round nuggets. These ancient coins were invented nearly three thousand years ago. Later, money was made from various metals. Their value depended on the size and weight of the object. These coins had to be weighed each time they changed hands. This process was not practical. Finally, coins were weighed and stamped with their value. That was the beginning of money as we know it today.

Her planning phase was finished. She had learned a lot about the history of money. Now Ginny was ready to start drafting her report.