



## Chapter One — by Russ and Kay Hively

The warm sun beat down on Larry Green as he stepped back from home plate. The 12-year-old adjusted his Cleveland Indians ball cap and leaned on his bat.

A train was passing by the open lot that Larry and his friends used as a ball field. When this happened, the boys stopped the game. The train was so loud, the boys could not hear each other or hear the crack of the bat. Also, baseballs were damaged when they were knocked or thrown under a rolling train.

Right now the boys were down to their last good baseball. It was hard to get new balls because of rationing, and money was tight for most of their families.

The boys watched the train. The passenger cars were filled with men in uniform. It was 1944 and almost everyone had relatives in the military. The boys hoped, by some chance, they would see someone they knew. The soldiers on the trains always looked out the windows. Some of them waved to the boys.

But Larry was not watching the train. He knew he would not recognize anyone from his family. His father was a sailor on a ship in the Pacific Ocean, and Uncle Chuck was driving a tank in Europe. At this moment he was worried about the pitcher he was facing.

Larry was a good hitter, but he was an even better pitcher. The other team was ahead by one run and his team already had two outs. Larry had two strikes and did not want to make an out. Besides, it was almost supper time and the boys would have to go home soon. The team that was in the lead when the first boy was called home for supper won the game.

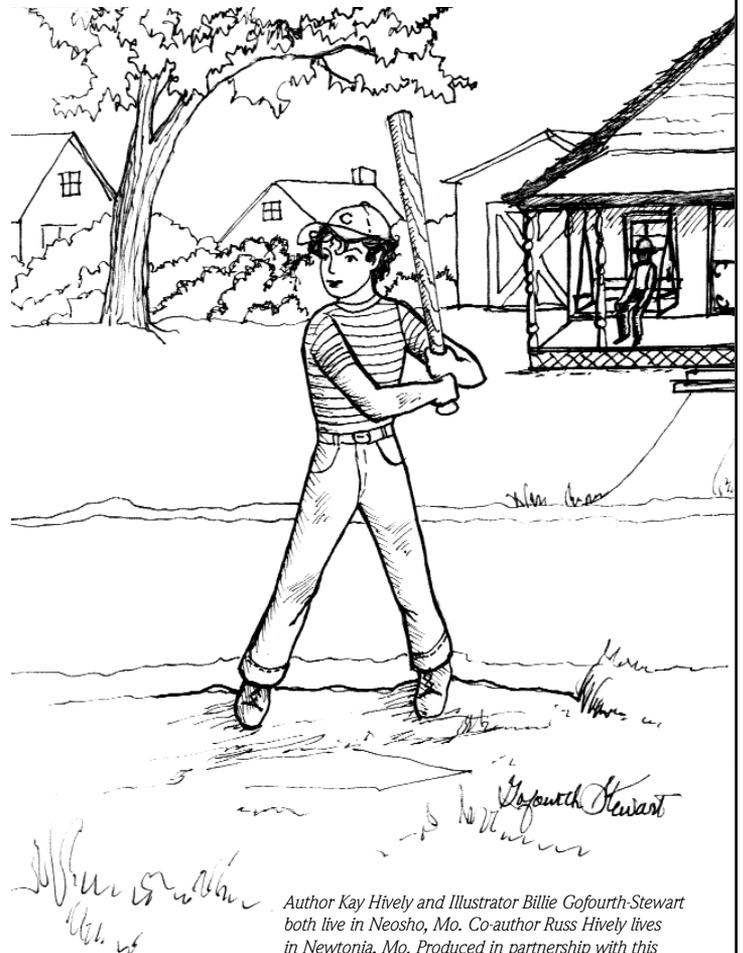
Larry adjusted his hat again, pushing it down on his head, flattening his curly black hair. There was a slight breeze from the north coming off Lake Erie. The breeze kept the players from getting too hot, but they were all dirty and sweaty anyway.

The train finally passed and Larry stepped up to the plate. He dug his feet into the dirt so he would not slip when he swung. Looking behind the plate, he saw Mr. Williams sitting on his porch watching the game. Mr. Williams always watched the boys play.

The opposing pitcher looked at his teammates in the field to be sure everyone was ready. The pitcher then turned back to look at the batter. Larry could feel that his grip was too tight on the bat. He relaxed his hands and thought about what his dad had told him — just put the bat on the ball.

The pitch was low and inside.

Larry checked his nerves and waited on the next pitch. It was right down the middle, and Larry swung the bat.



Author Kay Hively and Illustrator Billie Goforth-Stewart both live in Neosho, Mo. Co-author Russ Hively lives in Newtonia, Mo. Produced in partnership with this newspaper and the Missouri Press Foundation. Copyright 2005.

## Learning Extensions — Things to Think About and Do

- The servicemen rode on a train. List five other ways people can travel from one place to another?
- A breeze was coming off the lake, cooling the boys on the ball field. Why does wind help cool a person?

**Next Week: Chapter Two — A letter from dad**