

The background of the cover is a watercolor-style illustration of a forest. In the foreground, a young girl with long, blonde braided hair is seen from the back, looking towards a large, grey rock in the middle ground. The rock is shaped like a bear, with its head and paws clearly defined. The forest has thin, light-colored trees and a ground covered in brown leaves and small plants. The overall tone is soft and naturalistic.

Sarah Witcher's STORY

ELIZABETH YATES

a folktale from
New Hampshire

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Sarah Witcher's *STORY*



ELIZABETH YATES



journeyforth®

Greenville, South Carolina

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Yates, Elizabeth, 1905-

Sarah Whitcher's Story / by Elizabeth Yates : illustrated by Nora S. Unwin.

p. cm.

Summary: Describes the search for and adventures of a young girl lost in a New Hampshire forest in the pioneer days. Based on a true incident.

ISBN 089084-754-1

[1. Frontier and pioneer life—New Hampshire—Fiction. 2. Survival—Fiction. 3. New Hampshire—Fiction.] 1. Unwin, Nora Spicer, 1907-ill. II. title

PZ7.Y213Sar 1994

[Fic]—dc20

9427185
CIP
AC

Sarah Whitcher's Story

Elizabeth Yates

Cover by John Roberts

Illustrations by Nora S. Unwin

© 1994 by BJU Press

Greenville, South Carolina 29614

JourneyForth Books is a division of BJU Press

Printed in the United States of America

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ISBN 978-0-89084-754-1

15 14 13 12 11

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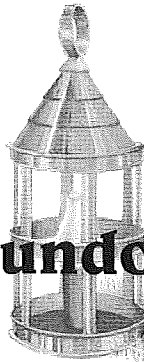
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Sample

Chapter One

Sunup to Sundown



“Sarah!” Pa’s voice was as sharp and clear as the sound of his ax when it bit into a tree. And it meant one thing.

Putting down the wood chips with which she was playing, Sarah trotted toward the cabin. Ollie, the big black dog, loped along beside her.

Pa stood in the doorway, the dinner horn in his hand. The other children had quickly responded to the sound of the horn, but it always seemed to take Pa’s voice to get Sarah.

She ran to him. With one swift move, he scooped her up in his arms, and she rode on his shoulder the rest of the way.

“What were you doing?”

“Building a cabin, like the kind you built for us.”

“Didn’t Ollie tell you it was time for the nooday meal?”

“Ollie was asleep.”

They went into the cabin and Pa set Sarah down on the bench by the trestle table where the rest of the family was gathered.

“Seems we always have to wait for Sarah,” eleven-year-old Reuben grumbled.

Joseph, younger by a year and quick to copy Reuben in everything, frowned at his sister. Little John, eight years old and hungry, drummed his spoon on the table.

“Children,” Ma said gently, “that’s no way to act on the Sabbath.” Her hand, just touching the cradle near one end of the table, continued to rock Baby Henry.

“But we’re hungry, Ma,” wailed five-year-old Betsey.

Ollie squeezed himself under the table to lick one bare foot after another of the several swinging there, then he settled himself for sleep.

As soon as Pa sat down, heads bowed and hands stilled as each one waited for him to speak the blessing.

“We’re thankful, Lord, for all the good things you’ve given us, and we’ll eat this food to grow strong in your service. Amen.”

The “Amen” in which everyone joined was all but lost in the sound of wooden spoons against wooden bowls.

Sunday was different from other days in more ways than its food, not only in the Witcher cabin near the crest of Pine Hill, but in every home that made up the settlement of Warren. Work was set aside in forest, field, and household.

Joseph interrupted his eating to ask, “Why do we say thanks for this food? We said thanks for it yesterday when it was hot; now it’s cold.”

Pa’s answer was brief and not to be questioned further, as his words came from the Bible. “*In everything give thanks.*”

Most of the hundred or so people of the township lived in cabins in clearings on the mountain slopes. Only a few lived in the valley through which the Baker River ran. There, at the crossing of wagon tracks and bridle trails, was a gristmill where the settlers brought their wheat to be ground and a sawmill for their logs. But there was no place for

Sunday worship. Until a meetinghouse was built, each family kept the Sabbath in its own way. Horses might neigh, cattle low, sheep bleat, hens cackle, but no sound of work would be heard.

Reuben had asked his father why this was so, and the answer had been as certain as all Pa's answers. "It's a rule of life. Six days we work from sunup to sundown; on the seventh we rest."

"But not from sunup to sundown."

"Not quite," his father had agreed, smiling at Reuben.

There were always some necessary chores that had to be done, even on Sunday. Everyone helped with them, and since they were few, a good part of the day remained for each one to spend as he liked. That part began for the Whitchers after the noon meal when Pa read aloud from the Bible.

Wooden bowls were soon emptied, noggins of milk were drained, and all put into a basket to be taken later to the brook for washing. Then the family drew up in a loose circle by the slumbering ashes on the hearth. There was no need for a fire, but this was always the chosen place for reading and listening. Warm as the June weather was, ashes would never

be allowed to get completely cold, since fire was part of the life in a settler's cabin.

Ma picked up Baby Henry and nestled him in her arms. Betsey sat near, leaning against Ma's skirts. Joseph and Reuben sat back to back. Little John took his favorite place near the chimney. Hands that on other days might have busied themselves with carding or whittling were folded in laps or sunk deep in pockets. Sarah lay on the floor beside Ollie. Snuggling against him, she let her fingers move in and out of his shaggy hair.



“What you going to read to us, Pa?” Joseph asked as he watched his father take the big Bible down from its shelf.

“We’ve reached the book of Job, and that’s where we’ll begin today.”

Sarah Witcher's STORY



One day Sarah follows a tiny bird away from her family's cabin. A clearing of wildflowers and a strawberry patch draw her deep into the thick forest. When night begins to creep through the trees, Sarah realizes that she is lost.

On the farm settlers gather to search for Sarah. But after long days of tramping through the woods, they begin to lose hope. Only Sarah's father believes that they will find her alive.

Award-winning author Elizabeth Yates tells the story of little Sarah's bravery, her father's faith, and the miracle that reunited the Witcher family.




JUVENILE FICTION/ HISTORICAL/ UNITED STATES

ISBN 978-0-89084-754-1



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Ages: 7-9