Ague ('ā,gyo͞o) in Adrian

By Janet S. Porter

The Life and History of Phineas Wolcott Cook, p. 11-12

CHARACTERS (4: 2 males, Train Operator and Narrator)

Phineas W. Cook (Phin)

His brother Daniel

Train Operator

Narrator

Narrator: Phineas Wolcott Cook, his brother Daniel, and Daniel's wife and children were on their way from Goshen, Connecticut to land in Kalamazoo, Michigan their father had settled the year before. It was the summer of 1837.

(Arrange chairs in a row facing the audience, really a bench against the wall on a train. The Operator is standing, but Daniel and Phineas are sitting and facing the audience.)

Operator: The train is ready to leave. Just hold on. This is a narrow strap line, so it isn't very smooth, but it's the very first train in America, and we're proud of it.

(As the train gets underway, the passengers begin swaying back and forth as if on the old train.)

Phin: (Holding his head) Oh, Daniel, I'm soooo sick.

Daniel: I know, Phin. You moaned and groaned all night in Toledo, Ohio. As soon as we stepped off that Lake Erie Steamship you could hardly walk.

Phin: I was sure I would die.

Daniel: Well, it *was* a terrible trip.

Phin: I was okay the first day or two. But then that bad storm came up, and we were tossed about seven days, until we thought that little boat would sink. I never even knew Lake Erie was that big.

Operator: It's because Lake Erie is shallow. The waves whip up and those light boats just go up and down, never forward. You're lucky to get to shore alive. Some boats never make it.

Phin: I know I'm lucky. But now I'm so sick with a·gue ('ā,gyo͞o), I can hardly even remember the week on the lake.

Operator: You'll feel like dying, but you won't. It's those blasted mosquitoes. They make you sick. You'll just be sick for a month and wish you could die. Then next year it'll come back and you'll be sick again. It's bad.

Phin: Is this train swaying back and forth?

Operator: It has such a narrow track it vibrates. Someday they'll invent a train that runs on a wider track.

Phin: I think the vibration is giving me a headache, and I'm getting fever and chills, even on this hot day.

Operator: You're going to Tecumseh, right. It isn't far. Where are you coming from?

Daniel: We're coming from Connecticut—Goshen. *(Holds up the map and points to each of the places.)* Came up the Hudson River on a wagon and went across New York on the Erie Canal. Then down Lake Erie to Toledo. It took us two months.

Operator: You're lucky you waited this long to get sick. That trip would make anyone sick. OK we're here now. Get your luggage and get off right here.

Phin: I'm ready to get off, but where's the station?

Daniel: This is just a bend in the tracks. There isn't a house or farm or a road in sight. Where are we?

Operator: Remember? This is the first train in America. We have no station.

Daniel: Phin, our luggage is under such a pile I can't get it out. Tell the operator to wait.

Operator: You can get off here without your luggage. I have to return here on my way back to Toledo after letting everyone off up the line at Adrian. Then you can get to your luggage.

Daniel: Phineas, you ride the train to Adrian with my wife and girls. Then on the way back you can all get off with our luggage. I'll get off now. My wife's brother lives around here. Maybe I can be back before you get here from Adrian. Enjoy the ride.

Phin: I'll try. Ohhh *(He holds his head in his hands.)*

(Daniel leaves and Phineas continues swaying as the train travels.)

Operator: And where are you headed, friend?

Phin: My father is in Kalamazoo County, Michigan where he just bought some land for about $2 an acre. Our whole family is joining him there, but my mother and younger sisters will come next year.

Operator: And how do you plan to get to Kalamazoo from here?

Phin: (Lifts his feet off the floor) On my own two feet.

Operator: You'll never make it. You're too weak and sick. That's got to be over 100 miles.

Phin: *(He turns his pockets out to show they're empty.)* I have to make it. We have almost no money. I spent everything I had on the Erie Canal barge, the steamship, and this train.

Operator: Well, you're lucky to have the railroad to get you part-way. It's the first one in this country—not many miles, but, hey, it's 1837. We're making big progress.

Family Discussion

Phineas was sick, exhausted, confused, and his feet hurt before he even started his one hundred mile trek.

How could he continue his journey with such a good attitude?

Studies have proven we can choose happiness, in spite of our circumstances. Abraham Lincoln said:

"Most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be."

Phineas decided early in life to have a good attitude through good luck and bad, kind friends or ill treatment, good fortune or hard times. He made up his mind to make the best of things whatever happened. His life would have been very different without that attitude.


Lake Superior
Lake Huron
Lake Michigan
Michigan
L. Onsario
New York
VT
NH
Maine
Hudson River
MA
RI
X Goshen CT
The Erie Canal to the Hudson River
L. Erie
Adrian X
Richland X
Tecumseh X
Toledo
Pennsylvania
New Jersey
Indiana
Ohio
MD
Delaware
Washington DC
West Virginia
Virginia