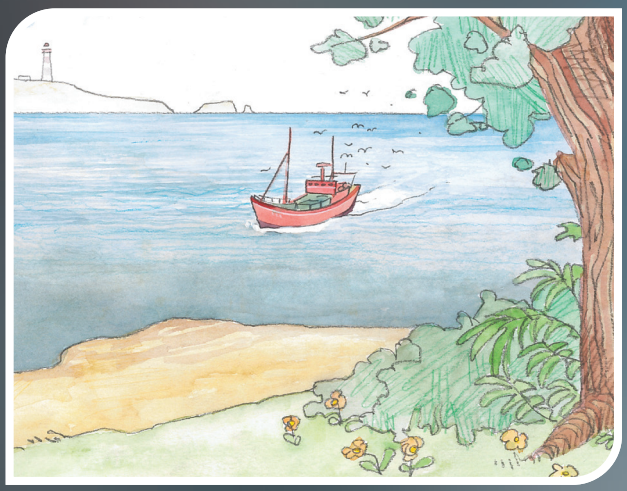
The Sun and the Raven

High Flyers



Ernie's Great Venture

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Reading booklet

Suite 2

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The Sun and the Raven

Long, long ago, the Sun ruled in the sky. His name was Wak, and his messenger was the Raven.

The Raven used to fly from Wak the Sun down to the earth, and from the earth back up again, carrying messages in his beak. In those days, the Raven was white all over, with not a black feather on him. He bustled about and the other birds all looked up to him.

All was not well in the kingdom of the birds. They weren't happy together. The big birds usually ate meat, but sometimes they would rush in and snatch the seeds and fruit that the little birds liked to eat. Most of the time, the little birds were content to scratch on the ground for seeds or to peck the fruit on the trees, but whenever they saw their chance they would dart in to grab a tasty morsel of meat from right under the big birds' beaks.

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Things became worse and worse. Quarrels broke out every day. Feathers flew, and claws clashed.

“We can’t go on like this,” the birds all said to each other. “We must find a way to live together in peace. Let’s find a judge who can advise us.”

“The Raven! The Raven!” several birds called out. “He is Wak’s messenger. Let’s ask him.”

The Raven agreed to help. He listened carefully as, one after the other, the birds put their points of view.

“This is a serious matter,” he said at last, strutting up and down. “I must go and ask Wak for his opinion. And you must all agree to do whatever he says.”

A babble of caws, tweets and hoots broke out.

“We agree! We agree!” chorused the birds.

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The Raven flew off into the sky. He was away for a long time, and when he came back, he called the birds together.

“Wak has spoken,” he told them, puffing out his chest. “Listen to his wise words.”

“We will,” the birds all answered meekly.

“Wak has commanded that the big birds should eat only meat,” the Raven said. “They should leave the fruit and seeds to the smaller birds, who must promise not to steal meat from the big ones.”

“I agree,” chirped the Finch, and all the little birds.

“So do I,” croaked the Vulture, and all the big birds.

“But what about me?” squawked the Parrot. “Am I big or small? Where do I fit in?”

“And me?” cooed the Partridge.

“You must take me as your guide,” said the Raven. “Anyone bigger than me should eat meat, and anyone smaller should eat seeds and fruit.”

“Good advice,” nodded all the birds, hopping up to measure themselves against the Raven.

“Wait a minute,” chirped a smart little Roller Bird. “What about you, Raven? What are you allowed to eat?”

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The Raven preened himself.

“I am the messenger of Wak,” he said, “and can eat anything I like – seeds, fruit and meat, they’re all allowed.”

The other birds glared angrily at him.

“That’s not fair!” they cried. “You’ve cheated us! We don’t believe that Wak spoke to you at all.”

They flew at him, their beaks snapping furiously.

The Raven was frightened. He shot up into the air and, beating his wings as fast as he could, flew up towards his master the Sun.

“Wak!” he called out. “Help me! Wak! Wak!”

The birds were close behind him, their claws outstretched. Up and up flew the Raven, higher and higher. In his fear he flew too far, until he was close to the Sun’s fiery rays, and his white feathers were scorched to a sooty black.

From that day to this, the Raven has been black from beak to tail, and all the time he calls out, “Wak! Help me! Wak! Wak!”

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HIGH FLYERS

The Wright brothers changed the way in which people would eventually travel around the world. They shared the same interests and passions, and worked together for many years.

Wilbur and Orville Wright were born in America, four years apart: Wilbur in 1867 and Orville in 1871. Inspired by their mother, who had a talent for repairing and making things, the young brothers soon became interested in how things worked. They often tinkered with household objects in an attempt to improve them. However, it was their father who ignited their early fascination with flight.

One day, on his return from a business trip, Mr Wright gave his sons a most unusual present. It was a simple model helicopter made from paper, wood and cork. When they wound the propeller, which was attached to elastic bands, the toy flew through the air when it was released. Wilbur and Orville were astounded – this was a toy like no other – it could actually fly! They christened it the 'bat' and spent many hours playing with it. When eventually it broke, they copied its design and experimented with making their own versions of the toy.

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The two brothers played together as children and worked together as adults. They published a weekly newspaper and wrote about the things they found interesting. The first edition included articles on *An Alligator's Mouth*, *Professional Inventors*, and *Toothpicks!*

Later, they opened a shop named The Wright Cycle Exchange where they sold and repaired bicycles. The brothers thought they could provide better bikes for their customers so they began designing their own models, which they built by hand in their workshop.

But it was their childhood interest in flight that was to eventually make Wilbur and Orville famous. The idea of being able to fly fascinated people around the world. Daring inventors experimented with gliders that had huge bird-like wings which were difficult to steer or control. There were many accidents but Wilbur and Orville were convinced that, one day, flying an aeroplane would be as safe as riding a bike. They read books about flight and cycled many miles to observe how huge birds, such as buzzards, were able to roll and turn in the air.

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Their big breakthrough came when Wilbur discovered it might be possible to control the wings of a glider in a similar way to those of a bird in flight. To test the discovery, which became known as wing warping, the brothers built a gigantic kite. They attached strings to the wings to move them up or down and left or right. The experiment was so successful that the brothers set to work building a glider that could be controlled by an on-board pilot.

Over the next four years, the brothers built and flew several gliders. But their real ambition was to build an engine-powered aircraft that could fly for longer and over a greater distance. In 1903, the first 'Flyer' (Wright Flyer 1) was ready: it had an engine that the brothers had designed and built themselves. On a chilly December day in 1903, despite a bitter wind, Orville made the first ever engine-powered flight: it lasted only 12 seconds and covered 120 feet, but the brothers were elated. They made three more flights that day, before a gust of wind caught the plane, causing it to nosedive to the ground.

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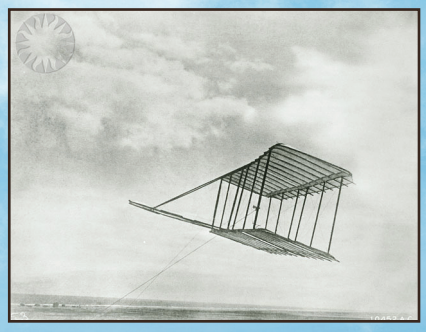

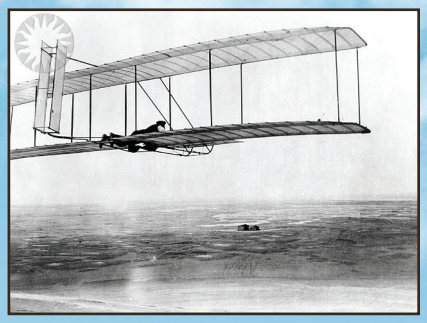

Despite a number of setbacks, including some spectacular crashes, the brothers built bigger and better versions of the Flyer, including one for the U.S. Army which could fly for over an hour. The brothers loved to show off both their aeroplanes and their skills by putting on public displays. The skeletal planes soared high into the air, looping the loop and skimming over the heads of the astonished crowd below.

Other engineers and inventors built on Wilbur and Orville's ideas. Pilots competed in air shows and races throughout Europe. In 1908, a Frenchman named Bleriot completed the first flight across the English Channel. None of this would have been possible without the determination of the Wright brothers: their ability to turn simple concepts into groundbreaking discoveries paved the way for the aircraft we now see flying effortlessly around the world.

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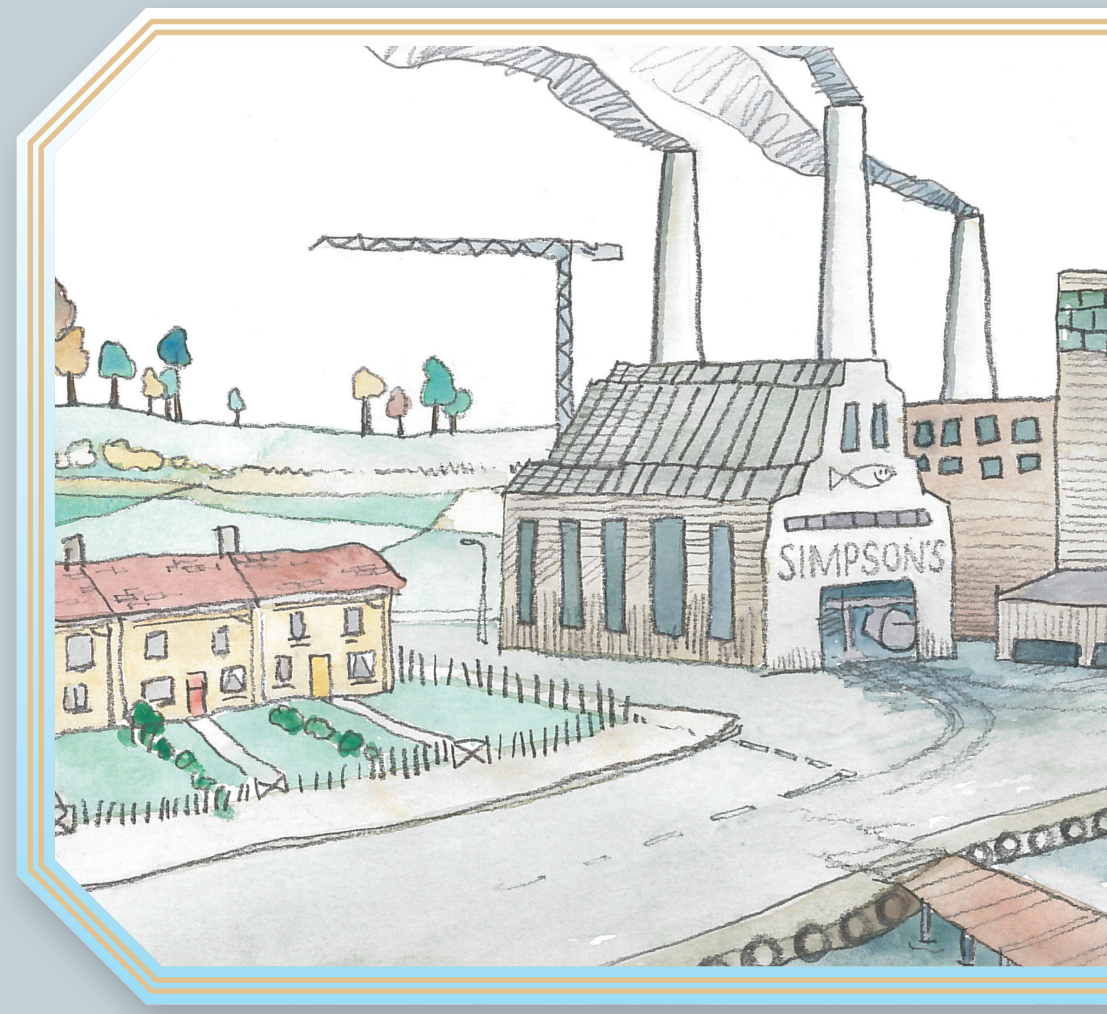
Ernie's Great Venture

It all started when Simpson's Shipyard shut. Simpson's had been on the river since the year dot. Blokes that lived by the river had been working at Simpson's since the year dot. Stan's dad had worked there until the accident. Uncle Ernie had worked there since he was a lad, just like his brother and their dad and their dad's dad and their dad's dad's dad. Then – kapow! – it was all over. They made cheaper ships and better ships in Taiwan and China and Japan. So Simpson's gates were slammed shut and the workers were given a few quid each and told to go away and the demolition crews moved in. No more jobs for blokes like Uncle Ernie. But blokes like Uncle Ernie were proud and hard-working and they had families to care for.



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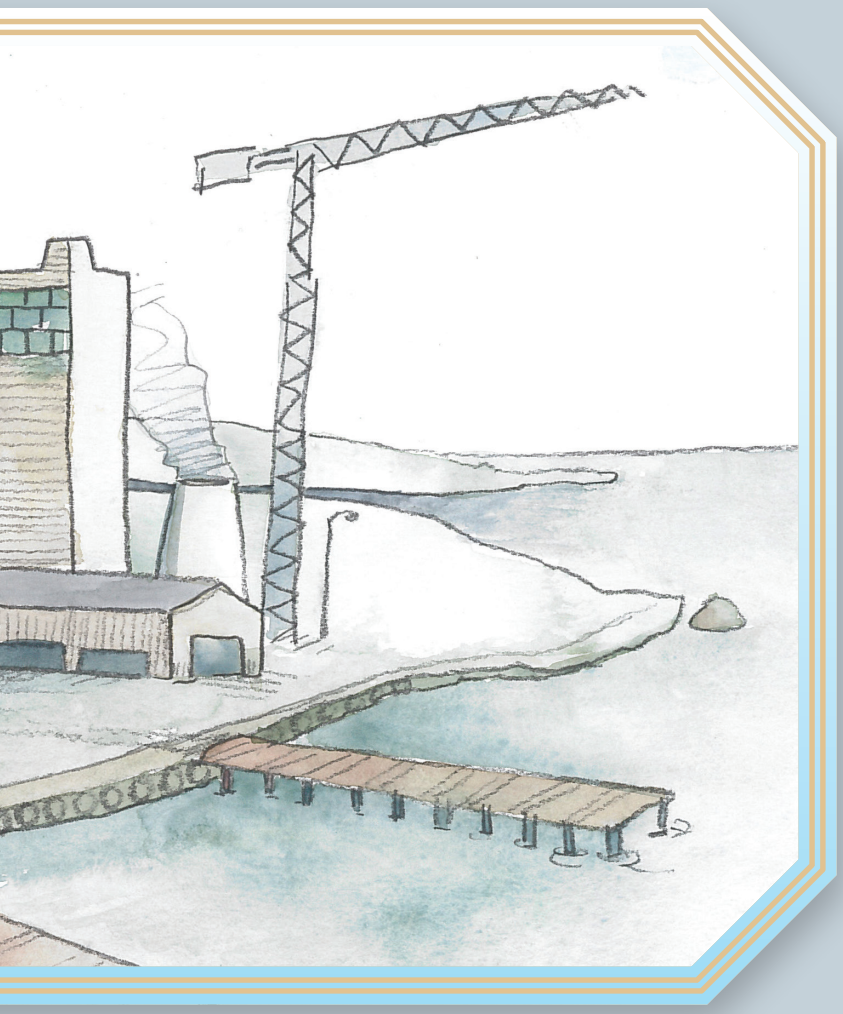
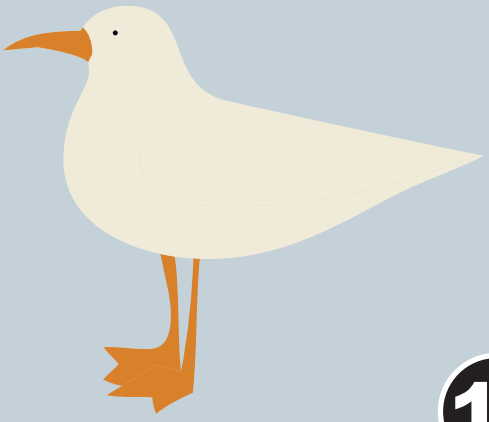
Some found other jobs – in Perkins' Plastic Packaging Factory, for instance, or answering telephones for the Common Benefit Insurance and Financial Society or filling shelves at Stuffco or showing folks round the Great Industrial Heritage Museum (special exhibits: Superb Ships Shaped at Simpson's Shipyard Since the Year Dot). Some blokes just turned glum and shuffled round the streets all day or hung about on street corners or got ill and started to fade away. But some, like Stan's uncle, Mr Ernest Potts, had big, big plans.

A couple of months after they'd flung him out of Simpson's, Ernie was standing with Stan and Annie on the riverbank. The cranes and the warehouses were being torn down. Fences and walls were getting smashed. There was wreckage all around. Wharves and jetties were being ripped apart. The air was filled with the noise of wrenching and ripping and banging and smashing. The earth juddered under their feet. The river was all wild waves and turbulence. The wind whipped in from the distant sea. Seagulls screeched like they'd never seen anything like it.





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Ernie had been yelling and groaning and moaning for weeks. Now he sighed and grunted. “The world’s gone mad!” he yelled into the wind. “It’s gone absolutely bonkers!” He stamped his feet. He shook his fists at the sky. “But you’ll not beat me!” he yelled. “No, you’ll not get the better of Ernest Potts!”

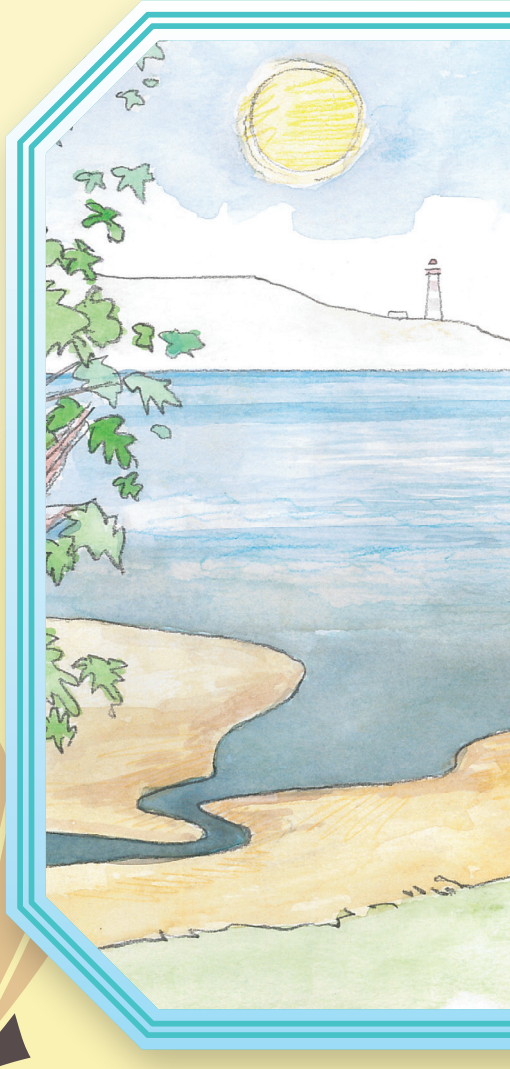
And he looked beyond the old shipyard to where the river opened out to the shimmering silvery sea. There was a trawler coming in. It was red and beautiful and there was a flock of white seagulls all around it. It was lovely, shining in the sunlight and bouncing on the tide. It was a vision. It was like something arriving from a dream. It was a gift, a gorgeous promise. The trawler came to rest at the fish quay. A massive netful of beautiful silvery fish was unloaded. Ernie looked at the fish, and suddenly everything became plain to him.

“That’s the answer!” he cried.

“What’s the answer?” said Annie.

“What’s the question?” said Stan.

But too late. Ernie was off. He belted down to the quay and bought a couple of pounds of pilchards. He belted home and put the pilchards on to boil. He got his wheelbarrow and he belted back to Annie and Stan, who were still standing there on the riverbank. He put a few sheets of scrap metal onto the barrow.



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Annie and Stan trotted at his side as he wobbled back home with them.

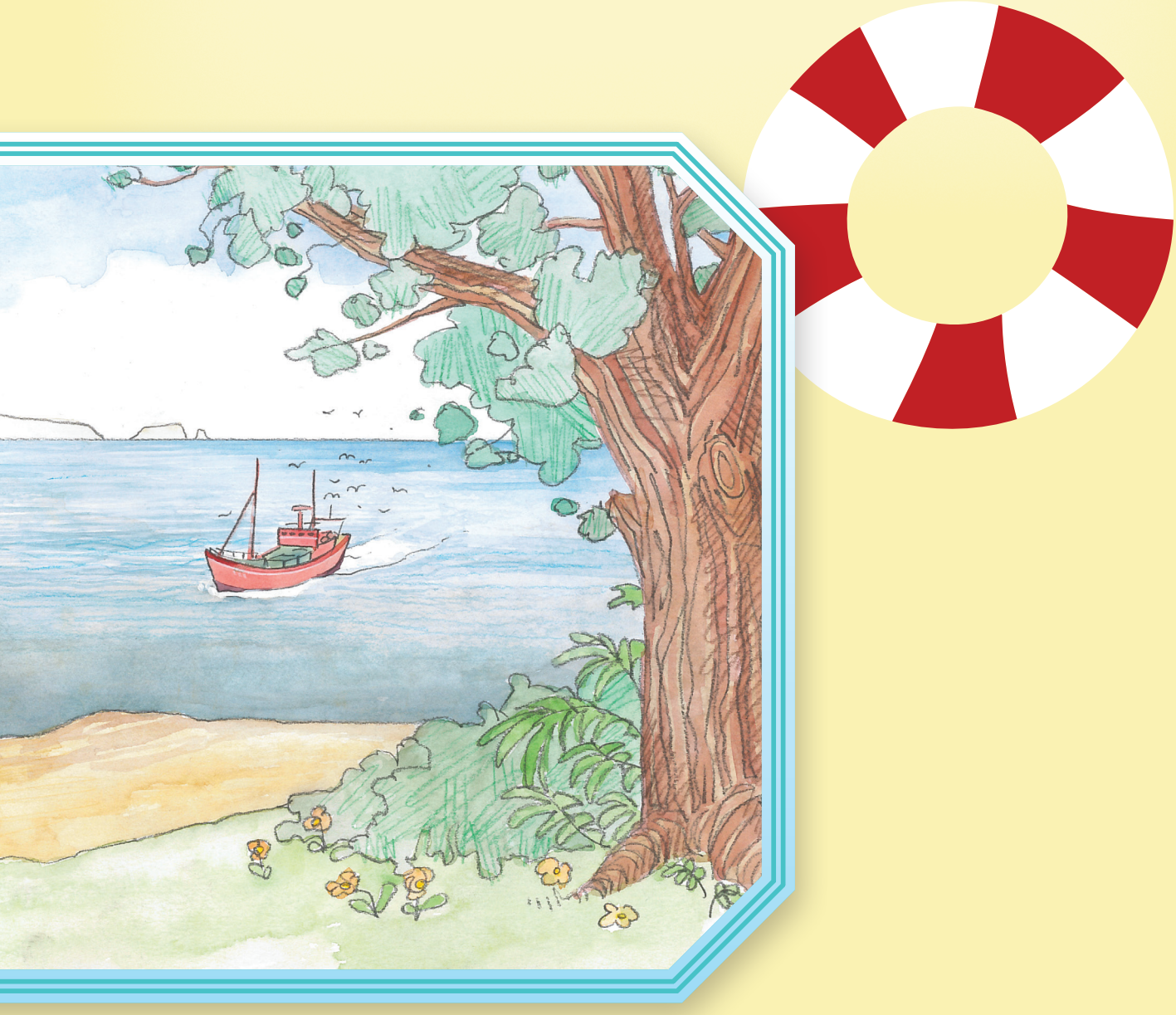
“What you doing, Ernie?” asked Annie.

“What you doing, Uncle Ernie?” asked Stan.

Ernie just winked at them. He dumped the metal in the garden. He opened his toolbox and took out his cutting gear and his welding gear and his pliers and his hammers, and he set to work cutting the sheets of metal and welding and hammering them into cylinders and curves.

“What you doing, Ernie?” asked Annie again.

“What you doing, Uncle Ernie?” asked Stan again.



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Ernie pushed back his welding visor. He grinned. He winked. “Changing the world!” he said. He snapped the visor shut again.

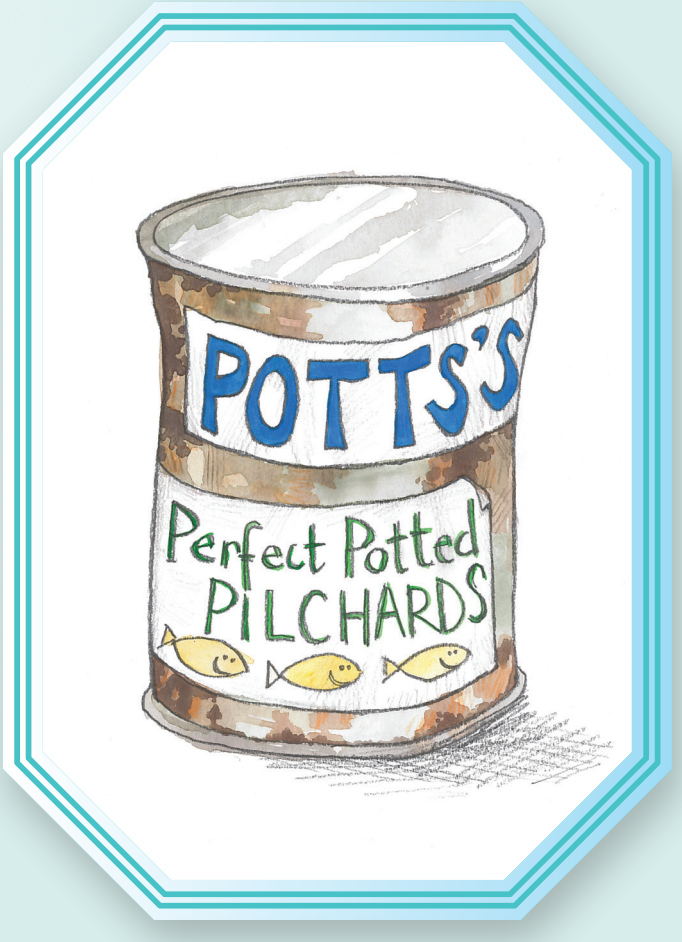
Half an hour later, he’d made his first can. It was heavy and lumpy and rusty and misshapen but it was a can. Half an hour after that, the boiled and pulpy pilchards were squashed into it and a lid was welded on it. Ernie scribbled the name onto the can with a felt tip: Potts’s Pilchards. He punched the air. He did a little dance. “It works!” he declared.

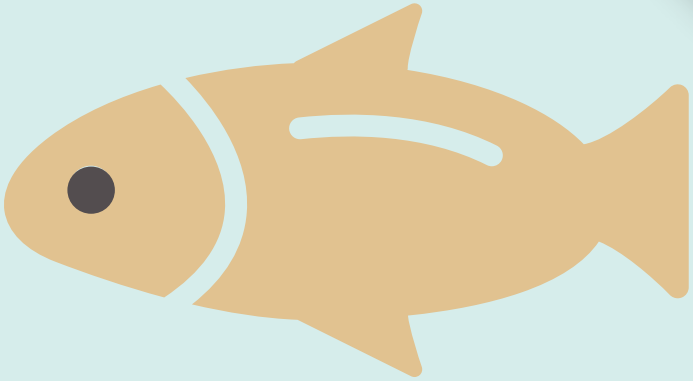
Annie and Stan inspected the can. They looked into Ernie’s goggly eyes. Ernie’s eyes goggled back at them.

“There’s a long way to go,” said Ernie, “but it absolutely positively definitely works.”

He cleared his throat. “The future of this family,” he announced, “will be in the fish-canning business!’’

And that was the start of Ernie’s great venture: Potts’s Spectacular Sardines; Potts’s Magnificent Mackerel; and Potts’s Perfect Potted Pilchards.





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