

## INFORMATIVE—RESEARCH

**There's No Place Like Home**

On a dark December night in 1776, as he led a barefoot brigade of ragged revolutionaries across the icy Delaware River, George Washington said, "Shift your fat behind, Harry. But slowly or you'll swamp the darn boat." He was talking to General Henry Knox (they called him "Ox" for short). There's a painting of George Washington where he's standing up in a boat scanning the riverbank for Redcoats. I always thought he just wanted a good view. But I guess the reason he was standing was because he didn't have a place to sit down.

Finding a seat in his own boat was hardly the worst of General Washington's problems. It was cold and wet and icy, and his men were tired and didn't have warm clothes to wear or even enough food to eat. The Revolutionary War was hard on everyone, but it was hard on Washington most of all because he wanted to be home with his wife and children.

From 1759, until he was called to fight in 1775, Washington lived with his wife, Martha, and her two children. Washington loved his big farm in Mt. Vernon, Virginia, and although he was one of our country's most brilliant generals, he was really just a farmer at heart. In a letter he wrote to a friend in England, he said, "I can nowhere find such great satisfaction as in working on my plantation." He didn't even want to be President. He said he would feel like a criminal going to his death if he took office. But after everyone voted for him, he felt it was his duty to accept.

Washington was our President for the next eight years, but during that time he just wanted to get back home. He would spend weekends there whenever he could, and he made sure he got reports on the condition of his farm. He also liked getting letters from his family.

Then, in March of 1797, Washington finally got to go home for good. There were no more wars to fight, and John Adams was going to be President. Washington had been a good President, but he was tired of it. Even his granddaughter noticed how happy he was to be home. In a letter to a friend she wrote, "Grandpa is much pleased with being once more Farmer Washington." I always used to think of George Washington as a soldier and a politician, and I guess I always will. But he was really just a farmer. He reminds me a little of Dorothy from *The Wizard of Oz*.

All she wanted to do was get back home. And finally the Wizard told her she could just click her red shoes three times and say "There's no place like home." But George Washington and his men didn't have shoes when they went across the Delaware River. Maybe if they did, history would have turned out completely different.