

The 16-part "Dreams of a Barefoot Boy" originally appeared in the 2017 Kansas Newspapers in Education. Have fun reading stories, answering questions, and completing activities while learning about Dwight Eisenhower's childhood.



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# "Dreams of a Barefoot Boy"

## Chapter 11: THE WRONG SIDE OF THE TRACKS



*"Because no man is really a man who has lost out of himself all of the boy, I want to speak first of the dreams of a barefoot boy... Because today that dream of mine of 45 years or more ago has been realized beyond the wildest stretches of my own imagination, I come here, first, to thank you, to say the proudest thing I can claim is that I am from Abilene."*

Dwight D. Eisenhower June 22, 1945

When Dwight Eisenhower was eight years old, his family moved from a tiny home on South Second Street in Abilene to a home on South Fourth Street. Dwight considered it a "mansion" because it had a second floor with three bedrooms. Years later he realized that the home had about 818 square feet of space for the eight people who lived there—hardly what would be considered a mansion (or even a decent sized home) today.

The home sits in its original location, on the south side of the railroad tracks that divide Abilene between north and south. Visitors are often surprised at how small the home is, even with the additions made when Dwight's grandfather moved in with them and two bedrooms and a new kitchen were constructed. Running water wouldn't come to the home until after Grandfather Eisenhower passed away and his bedroom was converted to a bathroom.

Most of the homes north of the tracks were larger, some truly mansions like that owned by Dr. A. B. Seelye, who made his fortune selling patent medicines. Residents in the southern part of town were considered to live on the "wrong" side of the tracks, meaning that they were poorer and often judged less likely to accomplish anything important.

Dwight knew that his family wasn't rich, but he never considered himself poor. The family was well-fed (his mother baked 27 loaves of bread each week!), adequately clothed (passed down from one brother to the next if they were in good condition), and never had to worry about being homeless. As soon as they were able, each boy earned his own money by raising and selling vegetables, working other jobs after school and in the summer. Because they worked hard for every dime they earned, the boys were careful to look for the best bargain when they went shopping. In elementary school, there was some friction between boys who lived north of the tracks and those who lived south and attended a different school. As they got older and attended the same high school, differences mattered less and friendships formed through sports. Rivalries developed with high schools in nearby towns as local pride took precedence over neighborhood disputes.

If adults had lower expectations of children growing up in the southern part of town, Dwight's parents never allowed their boys to settle for mediocrity. They may not have called it the American Dream, but Mr. & Mrs. Eisenhower believed that their boys had an equal opportunity to achieve success and prosperity. As

president, Eisenhower shared his story as an example to future generations that success comes from hard work, determination, and initiative, regardless of which side of the tracks one grows up on.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did Dwight consider his home on Fourth Street a mansion compared to his earlier home?
2. What does it mean to live "on the wrong side of the tracks?"
3. How did the Eisenhower boys earn money during their school years?
4. What is the American Dream?

### ACTIVITIES

1. Visit <https://eisenhowerlibrary.gov/about-us> to learn more about the Eisenhower Boyhood Home.
2. Using the description of the home and property from the website, draw a map of what you think the grounds looked like. Be sure to include a key for the map.