

Carl A. Peters
carlpeters@verizon.net

©2007 Carl Peters
20,000 words

VICTORY

(For the kid who is stowed away inside each of us.)

A Novella
by
Carl A. Peters

We all have dreams of great things for our future, right? But honestly, how many of us really know the “Secret Formula” of how to make our dreams come true? Where do we find it? Hidden deep inside the Great Pyramid? Buried under glaciers at the North Pole? Perhaps inscribed on that sacred tree which stands eternal beside the Fountain of Youth? No, actually, both the Fountain of Youth and the secret of how to make your most wonderful dreams come true may be found in a very common everyday place ... locked right there in your heart!

So, you wanna learn this great “Secret Formula?” I knew a kid once who learned it from a most unusual friend. Let me tell you their story.

But first, there’s one requirement. Before you can learn their “secret” you must imagine yourself as a kid again, even if only for the short time it takes you to read this book. There’s no other way to work the magic

“SAILING INTO HIS FOGGY PAST”

One Friday toward the end of school, back in May of 1969, Richie found one of those small green snakes in the grass out on the far edge of the playground. He put it in his pocket, as boys will do, and took it into home room with him after recess. The more he played with the critter, the more tickled he became over the idea of hiding it in his teacher’s middle desk drawer, hoping to see her jump or scream or, well, whatever young and pretty first-year teachers do right in front of the class when they find a small green snake asleep in their desk drawer.

Little did Richie know what earth-shaking nightmarish events he would unleash with that single boyhood act. Nor did he realize at the time just how much it would teach him about becoming a man.

The Last Week of May, 1969

“Richie, turn that TV down,” his dad insisted from the bedroom, “and get to bed as soon as the movie’s over.”

Richie hushed the TV to a whisper, then slipped into his room to get his big book, The Tall Ships, so he could identify the ships in the old Captain Blood film, a rerun that Friday night on the Bangor station. His Grandpa Elliott bought the book for him last year on his birthday when they visited the Penobscot Marine Museum in Searsport. (You see, I know these things because I’m his Grandpa Elliott. But let’s keep that our little secret, okay?)

When Richie returned to the livingroom he dragged Dad’s easy chair up closer to the television set, raised the foot rest, then leaned back and opened the book on his lap. Man, I wish I could have an adventure on an old Clipper ship like the ones in the film, he thought. He watched most of the movie before he conked out in the chair.

When he awoke, it was more dark than light outside and the TV was all snowy and hissing. The ship book, still open on his lap, began to slide off as he propped himself up on his elbows. He grabbed the book before it fell to the floor, then stretched, “Mmmmmmm,” and yawned, “Aaaaaaaaaa.”

His dog Ruff was sprawled across the braided oval rug in front of the TV. Richie smiled at his pal and Ruff’s tail brushed back and forth slowly. “Hi, Ruff,”

Rich whispered, rubbing his eyes. Ruff's tail swept the rug a little faster.

Suddenly the TV began blaring The Star Spangled Banner. It was five AM.

Richie dropped the book on the hardwood floor and jumped out of the chair, stubbing his toes on the leg of the coffee table. He hopped to the TV, holding his toes with one hand and reaching with the other to turn the stupid thing off. Ruff yelped and scrambled out of the way. No one else was up yet. Rich's younger brother's snoring was the only sound in the house.

Richie made his way through the eerie early-morning darkness to the kitchen and sloooooowly opened the refrigerator door. In that instant the fridge light dove out in a pie-shaped wedge and dodged around his legs. It skidded across the linoleum floor like a cat on ice, scooted up the wall by the pantry door, and hung from the ceiling like a cave bat. That dumb light always tried to get away. Rich jumped on it with both bare feet so it couldn't escape. Then he reached in and captured one of the ice-cold bottles of milk Tom Ireland had brought from his dairy Friday morning.

"Gotcha," Richie said to the bottle, then laughed a sinister laugh. "Now I'm going to drink you all up." He tore off the red cellophane covering, popped out the little round cardboard stopper with a paring knife, and was just tipping the bottle up for a drink when he remembered his mother always scolding: "Richard, don't you dare drink out of that milk bottle." Then she would point to the cupboard. "You get yourself a glass right this minute!"

While pouring the milk into a glass Richie glanced down at Ruff. “Want some Moo Juice, buddy?” When he looked away like that, the moo juice — as his grandpa called it — missed the glass, gurgled onto the counter, flooded off the edge, and cascaded down the front of the cupboard doors. What a mess. Rich wiped the counter with a dish towel and Ruff mopped the floor with his tongue.

Just then Richie spotted the pudgy red and white Humpty-Dumpty cookie jar squatting beside the bread box. Cookies! He looked closer as five or six of mom’s chocolate-chip walnut cookies carefully lifted the lid — with Richie’s help, of course. Their small brown eyes peered around the dimly lit kitchen, checking to see if it was safe to come out. When they recognized Richie they climbed down the side of the cookie jar, waddled over, and sat side by side on the edge of the counter, kicking their feet and smiling up at him with that toothy dark-chocolate grin of theirs. And one jumped right into Ruff’s mouth! Imagine that.

Rich shoved his feet into his threadbare tennis shoes — they were still tied from, well, ages ago — then pulled his L.L. Bean jacket on over his sweatshirt. He finished off the glass of milk and quietly helped all but one of the remaining cookies crawl into his jacket pocket. Yummm.

“Okay, you,” he ordered the fridge light, “get back in there!” It sulked as Rich closed the door, loathe to drag itself back where it belonged. Richie always wondered if the light hung in there in the dark, upside down and shivering, until the next time someone opened the refrigerator door.

Rich glanced up at the calico cat clock on the wall by the pantry door and watched her swish her tail and roll her eyes back and forth, like she'd done ever since he could remember. It was ten after five and morning was just waking up.

Before slipping out of the house Richie burglarized the pantry and found the bag of miniature Snickers bars Mom was saving for school lunches. He shoveled a handful of those guys into his other pocket, then zipped it closed. He heard them holler, "Help! He's going to eat us. Let us out, let us out!"

Richie's plan for that morning was to commandeer the end of one of the docks at the marina for some early-morning fishing, then chug back to the house later for breakfast.

"You ready to go?" he asked his fishing gear, which waited eagerly in the corner by the kitchen door where he'd stowed it the night before.

Ruff assumed he was tagging along as usual. "No, Ruff," Richie said softly. "Too foggy this morning. Stay."

Rich grabbed his fishing pole and gently opened the back door. SQUEEEEEEEEEK! Rats, he'd forgotten to oil the hinges like Dad had asked.

Aw, later.

Ruff wagged his tail and whined. Richie rubbed his head. "Shhhhh, Ruff. Be quiet. Sit." Ruff was part Lab and part Retriever so he always chased the gulls and rock birds and every time he'd come back soaked. Richie didn't want to mess with any cold wet dog rubbing against him while he was trying to fish.

Rich stepped out onto the back porch and slowly closed the door — SQUEEEEEEEEEK! — then slipped away into the spooky morning fog in search of another adventure.

“If the fog is this bad in the morning,” his dad had said the night before, “don’t ride your bike and do NOT use the Whaler.” The Whaler was the family motorboat.

“Bummer!” Richie had answered.

“No arguments, young man. Either walk to the marina and fish off the dock, or stay home.”

When Richie’s dad was really serious about something, he always called the kid “young man.”

“Maybe I could sit in Moby and fish over the side,” Richie had suggested.

“Suit yourself but don’t start that motor.”

Aw, what’s the use if I can’t explore somewhere, like out around the islands by the lighthouse? Bummer!

Rich walked down the driveway complaining to himself as Ruff’s barking followed him from inside the back door. Richie pulled his jacket collar up around his ears and walked a little faster.

The fog that morning was even soupier than the night before, making it almost impossible for the boy to read the large sign on the front lawn of their church.

Rock Harbor Bible Church, David C. Grant, Pastor.

Richie envisioned the fog that morning as some gigantic living Cloud-Thing from outer space that had secretly settled over Rock Harbor during the night and was holding the whole town captive. He clutched his throat and choked, pretending “The Thing” had him. As you’ve probably already guessed, Richie had quite an imagination when he was an 11-year-old boy.

He turned right at Spruce and after two more blocks he stopped, listened for a second, then scooted across U.S. Route 1 and headed down the long driveway to the marina. He kicked gravel every-other step and whistled as he walked, just in case anyone was hiding in the fog, waiting to ambush him. He wanted them to know he wasn’t scared.

The oak and maple trees along the way, normally his friends on sunny days, had now become giant greenish-gray gargoyles, glaring ominously through the dense fog. Their limbs were mammoth twisted arms with thousands of jagged green hands, each one reaching to grab him. The whole scene reminded him of a spooky cemetery in a late-night horror film. Chills ran up and down his back like the time Carolyn Palmer dumped ice water all over him at last-year’s Fourth of July church picnic.

He walked a little faster, keeping an eye on the trees over his shoulder, when — WHOA! — he almost walked smack into the back end of Mr. Brown’s

old Chevy pickup. Richie was glad he wasn't riding his bike; he guessed his dad was right about the fog.

Richie stood shivering in front of the dark marina office. The fog was like a ghost, thick and wet and cold, and it rubbed against him, looking him over as it drifted by. It whispered with the voice of a soft wind, "Hey, kid, whatcha doin' here this morning?" When he touched the sleeve of his jacket, the misty dampness which had settled there felt like cold dew on the grass.

The haunting deep "bellar" of a distant fog-horn drifted in from somewhere down the coast and the lonely old channel buoy way out by the point clanged its bell, begging for attention like it always did. These sounds carried with them the reassurance that things were still in their same familiar places. Richie just couldn't see them right now.

He closed his eyes, breathed deeply through his nostrils, then licked his lips. His grandpa used to tell him, "Yes sir, fog this thick, fella' can almost grab his-self a handful and chew on it like saltwater taffy."

Richie smiled, remembering the times Gramps would open his old pocket knife, pretend to carve off a chunk of fog, then chew it with exaggerated rubber-faced comedy. Then he would pry the imaginary stuff loose from the roof of his mouth with a finger, as though it was taffy. "Cinnamon this time," Grandpa would say, or maybe, "Licorice," and Richie would laugh. Grandpa acted things out a lot for Richie when he was growing up. Thinking back, I Guess Gramps had quite an imagination, too.

“I been all over the oceans of the world, R.C.,” Gramps used to tell him, “and there’s nowhere else on earth where she smells as sweet as a foggy morning on the Maine coast, down east in Rock Harbor. No sirree.”

Rock Harbor is that wonderful little Brigadoon-kind-of town tucked in tight between Rockport and Camden, sitting there warm as breakfast toast on a quiet summer’s morning, splashing its feet in the cool waters of the harbor.

Richie took another lingering breath and knew he’d remember this morning as long as he lived.

He was sneaking along the dock — if you don’t sneak in the fog it isn’t near as much fun — when he found Mr. Conklin’s lobster traps stacked up by his boat. Richie sat down on his coat tail and leaned back against one of the half-round wooden contraptions. He decided to relax there until the fog lifted a bit so he could at least see his bobber.

After finishing off a couple more of the chocolate-chip cookies he wiped the crumbs from his mouth, yawned, then crossed his arms in front of him, snuggling them close. The cool damp morning air made him shiver.

Richie was still tired from staying up late the night before and also from getting up that early, so when his sleepy eyelids (yawn) begged to close (much bigger yawn) for just a minute or two (major tonsil-tickling jaw-stretching eye-watering falling-over-backward yawn), he gladly agreed.

Now, to tell the truth, the boy might have fallen asleep that morning and dreamed the whole adventure, he wasn’t quite sure, but the things that happened

to him next seemed to jump right out of a 3-D, Technicolor movie. When he opened his eyes again — SHA-ZAAM! — there she was, right in front of him in the fog, not ten feet away.

“WOW! LOOK AT THAT!”

Rich jumped to his feet. What he saw stopped him cold, as though he'd walked into the fat glass door at the bank again.

There at the dock, smack in the middle of all the cabin cruisers, lobster boats, and sail boats, rested a huge old three-masted square-rigged sailing ship like the ones in his book. She was much bigger than the windjammers that take people for cruises up and down the Maine coast. No, this ship was more like the USS Constitution down in Boston or the old Cutty Sark in the pictures. And she was at least a zillion feet tall, like the ships in the Captain Blood movie.

Man, wonder how she got here? Must've been a tight squeeze.

Richie tilted his head back and looked up through the fog. Bet I could climb clear to the top of her 'riggin.' Boy, wouldn't it be neat to sneak up on deck and really look her over?

He glanced from side to side. No, better not. Her crew might be around somewhere — prob'ly up at Moody's Diner having breakfast. He was trying to decide whether or not to climb onboard when he heard someone coming.

“Shark”

“Thump ... ker thump ... thump ... ker thump.”

Richie squinted hard, searching the fog as the footsteps drew closer.

“THUMP ... KER THUMP ... THUMP ... KER THUMP.”

Maybe it’s the owner of the old ship.

Rich ducked behind the lobster traps as a tall skinny man with stubbly whiskers materialized in the fog. He wore a heavy boot on his left foot but attached below his right knee was a plain round piece of wood.

Wow! A real peg leg, Rich thought.

The guy carried a crooked cane, which he didn’t use, and clutched a small black bag of something in his other hand. The brass cap on his wooden leg made one last loud thump on the dock as the guy stopped close by Richie’s hiding place.

The man stood like a wax-museum figure, fingering his whiskered chin and staring at the three-masted ship. His eyes narrowed to slits as he leaned forward, glaring from side to side slowly, like a vulture perched on a limb.

His three cornered-hat was pulled low and his long shabby black overcoat hung like a wet sack from his hunched shoulders. Most of the brass buttons were missing from its sleeves and the torn dirty ruffles on the cuffs almost covered his skeletal hands. When he turned his head in Richie’s direction a parrot, perched on his far shoulder, peeked around the hat.

HOLY COW! This guy looks exactly like a pirate in a movie. Either I'm sleeping or someone's making a motion picture and I've walked smack into the middle of it. Aw, so what? Haven't been hollered at yet. Might as well watch.

The weaselly looking man curled his lip, then threw another ugly sneer at the ship. She rolled back and forth gentle and slow, as though asleep.

"Washtub!" he cursed deeply, his Adam's apple bobbing.

"Washtub, washtub," his parrot screeched.

"Washtub" must have been a pretty bad name to call a fine old ship like that, Richie decided.

"Washtub," the parrot cackled again, then gently rubbed its head up and down against the man's cheek.

The pirate smiled an evil smile and stroked the bird's breast. "Aaaaah, it won't be long, Compass," he said in hushed tones. "It won't be long, me pretty, and we'll have our revenge."

They laughed softly to each other as the pirate reached into his small bag and gave the parrot some kind of treat. He scratched its head and they cooed and talked to each other like two love birds.

At least he likes his parrot, Richie thought.

The pirate slid his peg leg a few more slow grating steps, then stopped uncomfortably close to Richie's location. The fog was still "thick as wool socks," as Mr. Peterson used to say, but now the clean fresh smell of the ocean had vanished.

Ugh! This guy smells like the dead shark that washed up by the lighthouse last year. Richie remembered that shark lying on its side, beckoning with a limp fin as each wave broke over the carcass. He also remembered the gulls feasting until they could barely waddle. But mostly he remembered that horrible smell.

“Washtub,” the pirate rasped again, hauling Rich back to the present. Then the man cursed and spat.

“Washtub,” his parrot mimicked, and made a spitting sound.

How’d he teach his parrot to do that? Still, Richie felt that any second a movie director would yell, “CUT!”

Richie’s legs were starting to cramp from hiding, so he changed position ever so slightly. When he did, he accidentally bumped a lobster trap. Instantly the pirate jerked his head back toward Rich. Sloooooowly the man raised a hand to his face, lifted his black eye patch, and glared straight at the boy with both eyes! Goose bumps ran up and down Richie’s skin like armies of ants, because the eye under that patch was white as snow.

The pirate slowly extended a long withered finger and touched it to the end of Rich’s nose. “Revenge, boy! Revenge!” he warned.

Richie was sure his heart had stopped. There was absolutely no doubt now — this guy was NOT an actor! Rich shrank lower behind the lobster traps and shivered — more now from fear than from the foggy morning air.

Finally, the pirate looked back toward the ship, hissed and sneered one last time, then shuffled away faster than Rich expected, his coat tails flapping behind him. But his parrot turned its head completely around and stared at Richie until the man vanished in the fog.

Rich listened to the peg leg thumping into the invisible distance and realized that the man had hurried right off the pier — no splash or anything! Richie slipped quietly to the end of the dock to see where the guy had gone but when he looked down into the water, there, right in front of him, just below the surface, was an enormous black shark. It lay almost motionless, its dorsal fin sticking out of the water. And perched on top of the fin was that stupid parrot.

For a minute Richie thought the shark had eaten the pirate in one bite but here's the scary part. That shark was glaring up at Richie, with one white eye!

Richie's heart flew up in his throat and he jumped back. After what seemed like forever the shark turned away and swam off into the fog. Richie stood like a marble statue for the longest time, shivering, afraid the shark might come back.

And that rotten, fishy smell hung heavy on the air long after the screeching of the parrot had faded into the mist. Then it was quiet.

See below, please.

Hello. If you were intrigued by this first chapter we would very much like to hear your comments, for better or worse. (Please email me at: carlpeters@verizon.net)

And when you write please tell us a little about yourself. IE: Your name? Where (in the world) do you live? What is your age group? (Okay, ladies exempted on this one.) Are you an author, agent, editor, publisher, teacher, or simply an occasional or avid reader of Christian books? I look forward to hearing from you soon,

Note: When a publishing date is set for *Victory*, I will inform all of our readers on this website.

Thanks much and Lord bless,

Carl Peters