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Regis University
School for Professional Studies Graduate Programs
Final Project/Thesis

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BRIDGING THE LITERATURE GAP WITH AGE-APPROPRIATE WRITING
FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL BOYS AND THEIR TEACHERS

by
Gary K. Hardy

A Research Project Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education

REGIS UNIVERSITY

August, 2006

BRIDGING THE LITERATURE GAP WITH AGE-APPROPRIATE WRITING
FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL BOYS AND THEIR TEACHERS

by

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ABSTRACT

Bridging the Literature Gap with Age-Appropriate Writing for Middle School Boys and their Teachers

Current research suggests that middle school aged boys are not involved in reading as much as middle school aged girls.

Researchers have identified several reasons behind the findings. The first possible reason is a lack of reading interest from boys. The second possible reason is a lack of age appropriate material targeted toward the interests of boys. The third possible reason is an influx of gender-neutral reading material.

This project attempts to bridge the gap by providing middle school boys with an age appropriate manuscript. The project also includes a classroom guide which provides teachers with ideas and reproducible materials.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Current research indicates that several factors affect middle school boys reading habits. One issue is that middle school boys are not reading age appropriate literature. Research also suggests that there is also a lack of reading material targeted to middle school boys.

Statement of the Problem

Middle school boys are not reading age appropriate material because of a lack of literature targeted to their age group. An informal survey of sixth grade male students showed that the chief complaint of this target audience was that the students were not engaged in the material targeted to their age. The survey revealed that the boys had already read “all” of the young adult action books available to them. The survey also identified a common complaint that the novels available to middle school boys were “sugar coated”, and they wanted more action packed, adventure that they could get lost in.

Informal research was conducted in order to determine if the students’ complaints were accurate. The author of the research found that there is an abundance of literature available, but indeed most of it was not of the genre these students desired.

Purpose of the Project

The goal of this project is to provide quality literature to middle school boys, that is free of profanity and “potty humor” while fully engaging them in reading. Another

desired result of this project is to provide a thematic teacher's resource guide to accompany the novel. This project is anticipated to influence the literature gap for middle school boys by meeting their desire to read genres with action and adventure.

Background of the Project's Theme

At the conclusion of this endeavor, it is anticipated that this project will have the ability to reach more students and classrooms with themes and lessons learned with this novel. To accomplish this, a teacher's resource guide was created to accompany the novel. The teacher's resource guide accompanying the novel incorporates various themes and lessons for literacy teachers to utilize in their classrooms.

Chapter Summary

This project began as an accidental learning opportunity as a new teacher attempted to reach students through writing. The new teacher modeled writing to students and taught them to be confident in writing to entertain. This project is also an attempt to provide age appropriate material that adolescent boys would find engaging. The classroom experiment has now evolved into a novel and a teacher's resource guide designed specifically for the Colorado Model Content Standards.

This project is an affirmation to current research, which indicates that there is not enough age appropriate material for middle school boys. This project was developed to assist in bridging the literature gap for middle school boys with age appropriate material. Current studies show that middle school boys are underserved as a target audience. This project is an attempt to better serve middle school age boys as a target audience by

providing a novel and teachers resource guide. The genre of action and adventure of this project is directed to specifically satisfy the chief complaint of the target audience of not having enough engaging literature.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There are many contentious issues within the walls of middle schools today. One such issue is in the area of literacy and steering adolescent boys to read. The middle school years are a profoundly critical period in the transition for boys becoming men. The aspect of reading does not seem so profoundly crucial until one takes into account that the reading skills developed or ignored during the middle school years will affect the boys for the rest of their lives. From school choices to career choices, adolescent boys are faced with a “fork in the road” which will impact them and their future generations.

Research has identified a “five year void”, between the ages of 7 and 12 where there is a decline in age appropriate literature (Langerman, 1990). Scholars, researchers and generations of teachers have identified several areas, which impact middle school boys reading. These areas include lack of interest, motivation, choices and preferences.

Teachers who are standing on the front lines and dealing with this issue can have a direct impact on student motivation. Teachers need literature and supporting resources that will allow them to integrate rich, appropriate literature with standards based instruction. This literature needs to have the ability to stimulate critical thinking in adolescent boys. (Langerman, 1990) Current research implies that a literacy gender gap exists between secondary males and females.

The “Harry Potter” phenomenon has demonstrated that thrilling, action packed literature will be gladly welcomed by adolescent boys (Haupt, 2003). Has there ever been another time in history when middle school boys have been eager and willing to

wait at a bookstore in anticipation of the midnight hour for the release of the newest book? What is more shocking to parents is that many of these boys, with a new Harry Potter book in hand, have to be told that they must put the book down and get some sleep.

The Five Year Void

According to researchers, the ages of 7-12 provide boys with a lack of quality literature targeted toward boys (Langerman, 1990). This age range has been coined, “the five year void”, by Ray Nicholle. He claims among other things that there is very little selection for boys to read once they hit the age of the void.

Other researchers have implied that the five year void could be attributed to more than just a lack of materials. Questions regarding interest and motivation are on the forefront as well when dealing with middle school boys and literacy. “Boys won’t read the watered down, insipid, cloyingly sweet books that girls will, but prefer to read action, violence, and villains.” (Langerman, 1990)

There are many reasons why the five year void could exist (Langerman, 1990). One reason is because there is said to be a lack of suitable reading material for middle school boys could be attributed to the fact that “mothers pick out books for their sons, not fathers, “most librarians are female, and librarians have control over public funds and the availability of suitable children’s literature.” (Langerman, 1990)

Middle School Boys and Literacy

In order for middle school boys to be successful in literacy, teachers need to determine the cause for the lack of interest in reading (Myhill, 2002). Once this has been determined, teachers can begin to find ways to motivate their students and provide them with age-appropriate literature.

Lack of Interest in Reading

Lack of interest in reading is a recurring theme for boys who chose not to read. There are numerous reasons for adolescent boys to not read. Struggling middle school readers like to read when they have access to materials that span the gamut of interests and difficulty levels (Ivey, 1999). Numerous studies show that by the time students reach the middle grades, they have become disinterested in reading. Other researchers contend that many secondary students do not lose interest in reading, but lose interest in the kinds of reading that they are required to do in school, such as textbooks and certain teacher selected texts (Micklos, 2002).

Worthy (1996 as cited in Worthy, 1998) discussed the importance of making available interesting materials to book reluctant readers. It is also stated that getting the right books into the middle school students' hands has a tremendous effect. All in all, the reading that seems to appeal to adolescent boys needs to be relevant and engaging.

What Motivates Boys to Read?

Students are motivated for a number of reasons. Research indicates that reading programs developed with a variety of materials and the freedom to read purely for enjoyment greatly enhances the chances of motivating every student (Towell, Hettinger, Knapp, & Harkins 2001). Middle school readers need real purposes for reading, given

that motivation is highest when students engage in tasks for their own intrinsic reasons (Towell, Hettinger, Knapp, & Harkins, 2001).

Research about reading attitudes and voluntary reading indicates that both show a steady decline as students progress and that resistant attitudes grow more prevalent in the secondary years (Cline & Kretke, 1980; McKenna, Ellsworth, & Kear, 1995; Shapiro & White, 1991 all cited in Worthy, 1998). One cause of this resistance to reading seems to stem from students not having enough control over the choices available to them. Research also shows that some adolescents actually read far more than teachers think some do (Worthy, 1998). Although adolescents lack interest in what is presented to them in school, they have not lost interest in reading as a whole.

Reading Choices and Preferences

One challenge for literacy educators is to relinquish control and allow students to read what truly engages them. Research indicates that middle school boys have very strong preferences when it comes to choosing literature. Rose, Zimet, and Blom (1972 as cited in Johnson, Peer, & Baldwin, 2001) concluded that young children, especially boys, prefer main characters of the same sex. Norvell (1973 as cited in Johnson, Peer, & Baldwin, 2001) provided evidence that male main characters are equally preferred by boys and girls in secondary grades, but that books with female main characters were preferred more by girls than boys. Yoder (1978 as cited in Johnson, Peer, & Baldwin, 2001) provided dramatic results in research that showed that the sex of the main character was the most important interest dimension for secondary students.

Beyard-Tyler and Sullivan (1980 as cited in Johnson, Peer, & Baldwin, 2001) studied secondary students' preferences with respect to the sex of story protagonists.

They concluded that boys' preferences for male protagonists became significantly stronger as grade level increased.

When students are permitted to read what really matters to them, they will likely be engaged readers for life. One area that can be engaging for young adolescent boys is in reading materials that relates directly to their own life. Literature that provides scenarios where adolescent readers view characters in young adult novels as living and wrestling with real problems close to their own life experiences as teens (Bean & Moni, 2003). Issues that provide relevance to middle school boys can often provide guidance to be followed almost as a roadmap. Middle school boys often deal with issues such as divorce, racism, family conflicts, and substance abuse (Bean & Moni, 2003). However, the overriding theme that middle school boys chose most often is violence, villains, and action (Bean & Moni, 2003).

Middle School Teachers and Literacy

Although middle school boys may lack interest and motivation to read, literacy teachers have an excellent opportunity to make an impact on their literacy development. Middle school literacy teachers are one of the greatest influences on adolescent boys' literacy development (Hammon & Hess, 2004). Teachers have the ability to influence student motivation by the classroom environment they establish. They can also influence student learning in the literacy program they establish such as creating a balanced literacy program.

Teacher Influences on Student Motivation

In 1762, the philosopher Rousseau speculated that any method of teaching reading would suffice given adequate motivation on the part of the learner (McKenna & Kear, 1990). Motivation on the part of the student is an intrinsic as well as extrinsic quality. Teachers are one of the greatest influences on student motivation and have the opportunity to motivate and engage students with reading that is relevant.

The middle school years are critical time period for students as they transition from learning to read to reading to learn (Hammon & Hess, 2004). This transition leads to the process of their independence in reading. However, teachers at the middle school level must not let the independent student become isolated. According to Hammon and Hess (2004) in all curricular areas except reading, schools demonstrate continuous support for young people's learning. In reading, however, we often act as if students are competent by the sixth grade and place the burden on them to continue to improve their skills and to choose to read without encouragement.

Literacy teachers must have an understanding of the needs of middle school student when making decisions about instructional practices. According to Irvin (1998 as cited in Hammon & Hess, 2004), a teacher needs to accommodate the following needs of students:

1. The opportunity to work in groups (social needs)
2. A vehicle for connecting new information to what is already known, thus helping students to feel more confident about learning new material (cognitive and emotional needs)
3. Experiences in abstract thinking that may help students move gradually from the concrete to the abstract levels of reasoning (cognitive and moral needs)
4. An opportunity to move and change activities (physical needs)
5. Successful experiences, which help students feel better about themselves as learners (emotional needs)

6. Motivation to learn because these strategies involve element designed to heighten student's curiosity about the subject (emotional and cognitive needs). (p. 32)

The Classroom Environment

There are several strategies that have been developed in order to make the classroom a literature rich environment (Hammon & Hess, 2004). Traditional classes were oriented in such a way that students would sit in assigned seats for the entire period.

Fountas and Pinnell (1996 as cited in Hammon & Hess, 2004) suggested that a classroom that is organized for literacy learning be built on the following theories about literacy:

1. All children can learn to read and write.
 2. Children learn about written language in an environment that is print rich.
 3. Learning is a social process.
 4. Learning is a constructive process.
 5. An organized environment supports the learning process.
 6. Powerful demonstrations are an important part of the learning process.
 7. Children learn best when they are responsible for their own learning.
- (pp.43-44)

One important aspect for teachers to consider in structuring the classroom environment is to allow students to take some ownership in the planning phase. Transferring of responsibility from the teacher to the student can inspire students to explore their own ideas and be more accepting of others (Hammon & Hess, 2004). Transferring ownership of the learning to the students and assuming the role of the facilitator is a significant benchmark for the teacher in creating an effective classroom environment.

Balanced Literacy

Teachers have the ability to influence students by motivating the students through the structure of the classroom environment (Walker-Dallhouse & Dallhouse, 1997).

Teachers can also ensure that they use balanced literacy in their curriculum. Balanced

literacy is a type of reading program which incorporates several different types of reading experiences. One benefit of balanced literacy is that the students get exposure to a variety of literacy sources. A balanced literacy program can help teachers keep literacy interesting and avoid doing the same old thing day after day.

A balanced literacy program can be especially valuable to middle school boys as it offers opportunities for students to interact with their peers. One sample of a balanced literacy program is one that offers (a) independent reading, (b) read aloud, (c) literature circles, and (d) guided reading.

In independent reading, students read from books that they choose. They periodically have a reading response as a journal entry. The teacher's main function is to move about the classroom observing and checking on the students. (Hammon & Hess, 2004)

Read aloud is the process where the teacher reads to the class to model fluency and pronunciation to the whole class. Read aloud is a great opportunity for the class to develop esprit de' corp. Read aloud is also an opportunity to enrich vocabulary as well as discuss critical thinking skills as a group. (Walker-Dallhouse & Dallhouse, 1997)

In literature circles, students are grouped by their selection of books (Quinn, Barone, Kearns, Stackhouse & Zimmerman, 2003). They are grouped with peers that share the same enthusiasm for the topic. Each group member is assigned a task to keep the group functioning. This is a fantastic way for teachers to develop a sense of community in their classroom (Quinn, Barone, Kearns, Stackhouse & Zimmerman, 2003). The groups meet once or twice a week to discuss their personal responses to the

readings. Literature circles are another way for students to learn to formulate and voice their opinions (Quinn, Barone, Kearns, Stackhouse & Zimmerman, 2003).

In guided reading, the teacher selects the materials and places the students in groups according to the purpose of reading (Quinn, Barone, Kearns, Stackhouse & Zimmerman, 2003).

On one occasion, the teacher may place the students in ability groups. Yet on the next, the teacher may organize groups with one advanced, one of moderate ability and one of lower ability student.

A balanced literacy program can be a tremendous asset to a middle school literacy teacher. It provides reluctant readers many opportunities for variety in their day to day literacy development. It also provides a great deal of ownership and choice to the individual student as well.

Critical Literacy and Middle School Boys

Even if teachers are able to provide students with choices and motivation, they need to be able to stimulate critical thinking on the part of their students. Critical literacy is that aspect of literacy which promotes higher order thinking and theorizing on the part of the reader. Critical literacy is a significant objective for literacy educators in trying to “hook” readers and stimulate the thinking process. Critical literacy shifts the boundaries of discussion between teacher and students, changes relationships, and generates substantive conversations about texts. Critical literacy causes the texts to become manipulable in order for multiple meanings to be explored. (Moje & Young, 2000)

A question that surfaces in relation to critical literacy is at what point or at what level must the reading material be in order to stimulate critical thinking. The first step in achieving critical literacy is simply engaging the reader in the topic and causing them to draw comparisons and relate the topic or issue to their own life experience.

Research does not indicate a minimal level of reading to achieve critical thinking as the topic depends on the individual involved, but it does indicate that educators can formulate a critical thinking discussion from literature as basic as Dr. Seuss. The reason for this is because middle school boys are motivated and engaged by peer conversations that relate to literature. It is stated that the first step in achieving critical literacy is stimulating interest in the reader.

The Literacy-Gender Connection

Concern for boys' literacy development is based on clear gender differences in verbal abilities that have been documented over the past few decades (Brozo & Schmelzer, 1997). Flynn and Rahbar (1993 as cited in Brozo & Schmelzer, 1997) report that boys of all ages fail in reading more often than girls. Test results in the United States in reading and writing show that girls achievement is consistently superior. Boys tend to outnumber girls in remedial classes, lower track classrooms, and learning disabilities programs far more than girls (Brozo & Schmelzer, 1997).

These statistics lead educators to wonder why boys exhibit lower achievement than girls. It has been estimated that 85% to 95% of teachers in elementary and middle

schools are female. This percentage has no known affect on boys reading achievement, but it may indeed have a notable effect on their perceptions and attitudes toward reading. (Brozo & Schmelzer, 1997)

With such an overriding female influence on literacy with boys, boys may associate reading as an activity that is inconsistent with the image of boyhood and maleness. Popular culture stereotypically portrays reading in a light not necessarily associated with masculinity. (Brozo & Schmelzer, 1997)

Researchers suggest that it would be productive in literacy development of boys to explore instruction that combines quality literature with positive male images. It is reasonable to expect that when boys are taught through the use of stories with positive male archetypes, their interest and motivation will increase and could lead to literacy growth. (Brozo & Schmelzer, 1997)

The Harry Potter Phenomenon

In recent years the world of literacy for adolescents was brought back to life by the Harry Potter series. The series created a phenomenon where children and adults of all ages began reading for enjoyment. This phenomenon created a window of opportunity for parents and teachers to share enthusiasm with their children and students and create an unquenchable thirst for literature in some children (Haupt, 2003).

The Harry Potter series has proven several things in regards to middle school boys and literacy. The first is that boys will read a book, no matter how difficult or foreign, if they are motivated. The second is that boys' books do not have to be simplified dramas, or novels full of inappropriate humor. The third is that children, even middle school

boys, will read interesting, long winded, hardcover fiction. The fourth aspect of the Potter phenomenon is that high interest in a book's topic can often help students transcend their reading level. (Hunt, 1971 as cited in Haupt, 2003).

The Potter phenomenon has provided publishers with the opportunity to re-release fantasy titles and publish new titles on its coattails. It has provided the opportunity to offer the world of literacy the chance to offer other titles that will interest, challenge and fascinate middle school boys. (Haupt, 2003)

Chapter Summary

The literacy development of middle school boys poses a tremendous challenge for educators. Several factors influence the literacy development of middle school boys. Those factors include: student motivation, preferences, available choices, as well as influences from teachers.

Teachers can have a significant influence on such things as, motivating students, the classroom environment, and appropriate literacy programs. Although the student in the individual who is ultimately responsible for their work, teachers can and do have a significant on their progress.

In Chapter 3, details are provided about the development of the teacher's resource guide and novel targeted toward middle school boys.

Chapter 3

METHOD

In the United States, researchers have identified a “five year void” between the ages of 7 and 12 where there is a decline in age appropriate literature (Langerman, 1990). The purpose of this applied research project is to develop a young adult novel and teacher’s resource guide for use by middle school literacy teachers. The goal is achieved by providing teachers a novel with various thematic elements and resources provided to teachers in the resource guide.

Format of the Project

This project is based on the creation of a young adult novel and thematic teachers’ resource guide designed specifically for middle school boys. The novel incorporates thematic elements such as multiculturalism, bullying, historical fiction, and life skills. The thematic elements included are introduced through various activities in the teacher’s resource guide. The teacher’s resource guide is designed with activities specifically aligned with the Colorado Model Content Standards.

Targeted Audience

This applied research project is designed for use with middle school aged boys, although some activities in the teacher’s resource guide could be used by advanced upper elementary students.

The novel was designed for use by individuals for pleasure reading, literature circles, guided reading, and teacher read aloud. The teacher's resource guide can be used as a resource for thematic units, literature circles, or guided reading.

Goals of the Project

The main goal for this project is to positively influence the "five year void" by providing middle school boys a novel that is specifically designed for their reading pleasure. It is also designed to provide three main elements that boys claim are missing from literature today, action, adventure, and the ability to entertain. Another goal of the project is to provide middle school boys with practical life skills lessons through examples provided in the book.

Assessment

Once completed, this project will be assessed in many ways. Teachers who utilize the resource guide will be provided a survey to receive feedback on the resource guide. Teachers will also be encouraged to utilize a web site specifically designed for the novel and teacher resource guide. Online feedback will be encouraged. Also, various pre and post test activities that apply to the thematic elements in the teachers resource guide will be provided.

Students will be assessed by an informal survey to be completed upon finishing the novel. Feedback from teachers will also be requested from classroom literacy teachers for input, ideas, and suggestions they have regarding ways to improve the unit.

Chapter Summary

This applied research project is designed for use by middle school literacy teachers for providing middle school boys with more age appropriate reading material. Teachers will be provided a resource guide to accompany the novel when used in their classes. The targeted audience for this research project is middle school aged boys. The goal of the project is to provide middle school boys a novel specifically designed for them and the genre they prefer. The purpose of this project is to bridge the “five year void” that researchers have identified for the ages between 7 and 12 with quality reading material that is age appropriate.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

This applied research project provides middle school boys and their literacy teachers with a manuscript that is specifically designed for them as the target audience. Middle school boys will find the following manuscript to be entertaining, action-oriented, age-appropriate, and relevant. The manuscript incorporates several themes that are relevant to the everyday lives and experiences of middle school boys. Following the manuscript is a teacher's resource guide designed for use by literacy teachers in instructing students. Literacy teachers will find the resource guide to be potentially useful in literacy circles, whole class instruction, or during differentiated instruction with reluctant readers.

Manuscript

The Santa Cruz Mountain Boys manuscript was specifically designed for use by middle school boys and the literacy teachers. The author created the manuscript as a result of receiving complaints by middle school boys that there is not enough interesting literature in the library. Research that outlined the literary desires of middle school boys was obtained. The boys asserted that they desired more action, adventure, realism, and relevance.

Teacher's Resource Guide

Following the manuscript is a teacher's resource guide designed for the literacy teachers of middle school boys. The resource guide incorporates various activities that

are relevant to middle school reading and writing standards. A wide variety of activities were included to provide a well-rounded reading and writing experience for the users.

The Santa Cruz Mountain Boys

Book one: The Bookmark

By: G. Hardy

This is a work of fiction; any resemblance between the characters in this book and real persons is coincidental.

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To the reader:

Thanks for choosing *The Santa Cruz Mountain Boys*. I hope you find this book to be entertaining, engaging and motivating. I wrote this book with the hopes of providing an entertaining story line with humor and positive life lessons without inappropriate words or crude “potty humor”.

As a teacher, I have become frustrated with some of the materials that I sometimes see enter my classroom. I believe that authors can entertain readers without the shock factor using swear words. I learned this as a child when I was highly entertained by the famous comedian Sinbad. I watched him in an interview proclaim that people can be entertained well without inappropriate material. His words had an effect on me then, and to this day I wholeheartedly agree with Sinbad.

If you found this book to be entertaining and enjoyable, I have also set up a web site for your use. On the web site, I have placed downloadable and printable mini-posters from the book. The illustrations in the book are also printable.

I have also included a free teachers resource guide for use with literacy circles, whole class, or individual instruction.

Thanks again for choosing the Santa Cruz Mountain Boys. I have planned this to be a five book series. The second book in the series is titled *The Secret Samaritans*. Enough said, turn the page and begin the amazing adventures with *The Santa Cruz Mountain Boys*.

Best regards,

G. Hardy

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CHAPTER 1

THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE

While waiting for the rescue helicopter, Rico Cardenez's mind overflowed with thoughts and emotions. So many times before, he tested the limits of his mortality to save others. He closed his eyes and relived the events that led to this fight for survival. Just moments before, Kevin and Rico were sent to perform the last 911 rescue. He could hear Kevin's voice replaying in his mind.

"Hey Rico, we just got another call from the dispatchers," said Kevin as he waded through shin-deep water. The two firefighters had been performing rescues during the worst flood in California history.

"What about?" asked Rico.

"Some lady down the road just got caught in a washout. Her car was swept into Orchard Creek."

"Let's go get her!"

"We have to hold up here for a while."

"Why? What are we waiting for?"

"Dispatch told me that we need the chopper to get us to the rescue point, but it's tied up with Murphy and Orlando. They're a couple miles up the road doing another pull. They said it should only be a few more minutes for the chopper to come take us there."

"Why do we have to wait here? Can't we take my truck and meet the chopper?"

"No, we're supposed to wait for the chopper."

"Why? We're firefighters! That's what we do!"

"I know, but there's no safe zone. Apparently the flooding is much worse there."

"What about the lady, can her car hang on?"

"It sure doesn't sound like it. Dispatch lost contact with her. The last thing she told them was that her car was barely hanging on to a small tree she rammed into. My gut tells me to throw the book out on this one. If we go by the book, I don't think she'll make it!"

"Alright, alright, if they want us to wait, then we better wait."

"Really?"

"Forget that! One way or the other, our butts are on the line, so let's go!"

"Works for me!" said Kevin.

"Call dispatch on the private line and tell them we're headed there. Tell em' we'll wait there for the chopper."

"You got it buddy! But, there's one more thing."

"What?" said Rico as they closed the truck door and began to barrel down the road through what seemed like a raging river.

"She's pregnant and feeling labor pains. For all we know, she could be having a kid right now!"

"Pregnant? We can't wait for the chopper!"

"I know, but how are we going to hook her up? If she's in labor, we need the rescue basket. Our lines could hurt her or the baby."

"We'll just have to get to her and have her ready for the basket when the chopper arrives," said Rico.

"Sounds like a plan."

“Hey Kev. Grab the line behind your seat. Hook me up now so I don’t waste any time.”

“It’s my turn Rico! You haven’t taken a break yet today. It’s your day off for crying out loud! What are you doing here anyway?”

“This is the storm of the century. I wouldn’t miss it for a million bucks. Plus, you guys need me!”

“Here’s a quarter; let’s at least flip for it!” yelled Kevin as Rico stopped the truck in what could hardly be called a safe zone. They jumped out of the truck into water rushing all around them at shin level.

“We’re not flipping for it this time. I got it Kev!”

“Where is she? I don’t see anybody in that car. Maybe somebody already got her out. I’m going to call in and check it out.”

While Kevin called dispatch, Rico noticed some toes sticking up at the edge of the car window.

“She’s in there. I’m going! Tell em’ to have an ambulance ready for us!” yelled Rico.

“It’s my turn Rico! Give me the line.”

“I don’t care whose turn it is Kev. I can’t get my wife Anna and my baby boy out of my mind. I don’t think you can make it. You’re still not up to full speed from the flu last week,” yelled Rico through the tidal wave of sounds.

“I don’t think anyone can make it in this, Rico. I changed my mind; let’s wait for the chopper! I gotta bad feeling about this!”

“I’m good to go Kev. If we wait, you and I both know that lady won’t make it. Look how the car is shifting!” said Rico as they both watched the car listing like a boat about to capsize.

Rico trudged upstream a little ways, hoping to use the raging water to deliver him to the car. The current was too high and too strong for him to walk in.

When Rico reached the car, he heard the frightened lady on the back seat mumbling something resembling a prayer. “How about one for me while you’re at it!” said Rico looking closer and noticing the baby already on its way. He reached inside the front window, rolled it down, and climbed inside.

“I’m looking for a dry place to stay for a couple minutes. Mind if I join you?”

The comment helped ease the tension while he positioned her for delivery. Fortunately the baby was almost out.

“Just a couple more pushes and the hard part will be over,” said Rico.

“Hard part, what about the flood?” asked the terrified lady.

“No problem, I’m a Santa Cruz firefighter. Give me a couple good pushes so we can get out of here,” Rico said as the car began to violently shift.

“You don’t get paid enough for this job!” yelled the lady as she gave one great push.

“It’s not about the money; it’s about times like this. Making a difference and saving lives,” said Rico as he held the new baby and laid him on her chest. “Congratulations on your new baby boy!”

“Please, take care of my baby! Don’t worry about me! Just make sure he’s okay!” she yelled.

“You’re both going to be just fine. Soon you’ll be snuggled up together in your warm dry home. My wife is pregnant with a boy also. Maybe someday we can all go on a picnic together. There’s the chopper.”

“Take my baby first!” she screamed.

“You’re going together. Hold him while I get the basket ready. They’ll drop it any second now.”

The car suddenly rocked again, Rico saw that the small tree keeping the car from washing away begin to lean.

“Here, put this line around your waist while I hold the baby. After you get the line on, climb on the roof and I’ll hand you the baby. The basket’s coming down so be ready to get in fast. We don’t have much time!” yelled Rico.

“What about you?”

“I’ll be just fine. The basket won’t hold the three of us. They’ll come back for me,” said Rico knowing what lay ahead.

As the car filled with water, Rico leaned out the window and helped secure the mother and child in the basket, which was lying on the roof. After securing the basket, Rico climbed up on the roof and gave the thumbs up for the chopper to take off.

“See you at the picnic!” yelled Rico as he now focused on his own survival.

With the water level covering the roof, Rico signaled Kevin to throw another line. Kevin tried throwing the line but the distance was too far and the current was now far too strong.

After throwing the line out a few times, Kevin decided to tie the line around himself and hook up to Rico’s truck. As Kevin made it halfway to the now almost floating car, Murphy and Orlando arrived at the scene. Murphy jumped in Rico’s truck and tried to drive closer hoping to get Kevin within reach of Rico.

Rico watched helplessly as his partner desperately tried reaching the car. Kevin was completely under the rushing water except for the brief periods he could raise his head and come up for air. Rico could see Kevin was quickly losing energy and slowly drowning. He signaled for Murphy to pull the truck back out of the water.

Rico had no choice but to wait for the chopper. He watched as the tree began to uproot. Knowing he wouldn’t walk away from this rescue, he whispered to himself, “Please forgive me Anna, I tried to do the right thing.” A calm surrender enveloped him as he prepared for what lay ahead. “God help my baby boy!” was his last plea as the car washed out.

CHAPTER 2 STICKS AND STONES

Almost fourteen years later that baby boy Rico prayed about in his final plea was now a teenager walking on his way to school when he heard the chant outside of Redwood Middle School.

“STIR UP TROUBLE,”

“MAKE SOME NOISE,”

“WE ARE THE SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAIN BOYS!”

That was the poetic chant that rang daily in Ricky Cardenez’s ears. And as he rounded the last street corner to the school, it rang again.

“S--I--S--S--Y,”

“YOU AIN’T GOT NO ALIBI!”

“Ha, Ha, Ha!” The obnoxious laugh that followed the chant seemed routine to Bo Batura and friends as they ran towards Ricky Cardenez, making his way to school.

“Well, here we go again. Be ready for anything,” whispered Ricky as he clutched the lucky rabbit’s foot in his pocket, wishing it would make this situation go away.

As they approached, the three “wanna-be thugs” surrounded Ricky and continued the taunting.

“Did you hear that, Cardenez? What are you going to do about that?”

Ricky stood his ground and said, “Get out of my face, Bo. You act tough, but you’re just as much a chicken as you say Jordi is. At least Jordi had the guts to stand up to you. I’m not going to fight you.”

Bo’s only comeback was to say, “See guys, he’s a panty waist. Can’t fight ‘cause you might break a nail?”

“No, Bo, I’m not fighting because I choose not to.”

“Cardenez, you don’t have the guts to take me on ‘cause when you mess with one of us, you mess with all of us. We’re the Santa Cruz Mountain Boys.”

With that, Bo yet again pushed Ricky as he tried to walk through the circle of bullies. Ricky broke through but was pushed from behind by both Bo and Zach. As he made it through the chain of fools, he fell down and dropped his books. While gathering and restacking his books, Bo stepped on Ricky’s hand.

“Ow!” grimaced Ricky as he quickly stood up and got face-to-face with Bo. He gritted his teeth to hold back his pain and anger, and whispered:

“Bo, if we fight, you’ll be the one who cries and runs home embarrassed. Your friends won’t help you.”

“You hang out here behind the school and skip class and smoke hoping that people will think you’re cool, but it doesn’t work that way,” said Ricky.

“And about Jordi--you only pick on him because you think he’s a weakling. But he’s not; he’s just not obnoxious like you. I won’t fight you, but I won’t let you bully Jordi again. While you guys hang out here killing more brain cells smoking, I’m going to class.”

As Ricky walked to class he heard the three boys laughing at him. Off in the distance, he saw a man observing the situation. Unsure of whom the man was or if he was a new faculty member, Ricky was thankful that he had not been suckered into fighting. Ricky knew that it wouldn't end there, but at least they knew not to mess with Jordi, especially now that Ricky was their newest target.

CHAPTER 3

JORDI

Though late for first period, Ricky made it to class before the late bell. He had a little time to talk with Jordi at their table as Mrs. Sinton spoke with another teacher outside the classroom.

“What took you so long this morning?” Jordi asked.

“SCMB,” answered Ricky. “They were hanging out smoking by the dumpsters again. Man! I’m so close to giving in.”

“Giving in?” asked Jordi.

“Yeah, I’m getting so close to just fighting them. I don’t want to, but if they make me I will.”

“I’m sorry Ricky; it’s my fault you’re catching so much flack from them. It’s amazing how much they seem to hate me, yet they devote so much of their time harassing me. It’s like I’m the most important part of school for them.”

“Those jerks hate everybody. You don’t have any reason to fight. Just because you don’t look or act the way they think you should is no reason to fight.”

“What did they say?”

“Oh, the same old boring stuff. They circled around me and knocked my books out of my hand when I wasn’t looking. Bo stepped on my hand as I was picking up my books. Man, I was so close to punching him right then and there. My hand is in agony right now. But the worst part is standing there and listening to them shouting things at me. I mean, I know about the sticks and stones saying, but every time I hear them call me a momma’s boy, it’s just another reminder that I don’t have a dad,” answered Ricky while showing his aching fingers.

“Man, Ricky, I haven’t had a lot of friends my whole life. I’m sorry you got into this, but I sure appreciate it. I hope to someday be the same kind of friend back to you.”

“No problem Jordi. I know you’d help me if I were in your shoes. I just keep wishing it would all go away. I’m getting so desperate that I actually carried a lucky rabbit’s foot in my pocket today. Or at least I thought it was lucky, but I guess not. Can you believe that I actually wished for some way that we could all be friends?” said Ricky.

“Hey Ricky, don’t laugh at me, but we had chicken for dinner last night, and I got the wishbone. I kind of wished for it all to end also, but your hand answers the question about whether my wish came true or not.”

“Maybe we need a four-leaf clover or something, because this rabbits’ foot sure isn’t doing the trick!” said Ricky.

“Or one of those magic wands that you see in the movies. If it could only be that easy, huh?” said Jordi while making swishing motions as if he had a magic wand in his hand.

“Hey man, how’s a rabbit’s foot supposed to be lucky anyway? I mean that poor rabbit is hopping around on three feet now. What’s lucky about that?” asked Jordi.

“The rabbit that went with this foot isn’t around anymore. This thing is over fifty years old. Somebody gave it to my mom a long time ago. I guess the foot used its luckiness up back then.”

“Hey Ricky, no offense but that’s kinda’ gross ya know?”

“What?”

“That you’re walking around with a fifty-year-old foot in your pocket.”

“I guess it’s pretty nasty when you think about it that way, but I’m getting desperate.”

“That thing about being friends with Bo, you seriously wished for that? Friends with Bo and those two goons? That’ll be the day I try out for the football team,” said Jordi.

“Someday, Jordi, someday.”

“Hey Ricky, if that rabbit’s foot isn’t so lucky, can I borrow it for fourth period?” asked Jordi.

“Why?”

“‘Cause I wanna put it in Shelby’s desk. Man, that would really freak her out!”

“You still have a crush on her?” asked Ricky.

“Kind of.”

“Well, why do you want to freak her out if you like her?”

“I don’t know, I’m a guy. It seemed like a good idea at first.”

“Jordi, I’m no Romeo, but the way to a girl’s heart sure isn’t by freaking her out.”

“I guess, Ricky, but it sure beats that sappy love talk stuff you see on television.”

“Sounds like a pretty strange way to let a girl know that you like her, but then again, what do I know about girls?” said Ricky.

“Oh Ricky, you’re the man, you just don’t know it yet. I’ve heard girls in third period whispering your name and talking about you.”

“Whatever!” said Ricky turning his head away blushing.

CHAPTER 4

THE SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAIN BOYS

It seems like there's a Jordi in every school--sometimes in every class. Nellis Franklin Jordan was his full name. With a first name like Nellis, it's obvious why he favored the nickname Jordi. Jordi had one big problem--he was a nice kid. This was enough for the Santa Cruz Mountain Boys to make him the target of every prank, gag, and cruel humiliation they could think of. It seemed like everything started when they entered middle school.

Every school has at least one bully, but Redwood Middle School had three. They happened to be the meanest kids in school. They nicknamed themselves the Santa Cruz Mountain Boys.

The name had been around for over fifty years, but Bo, Zach, and Matt had changed the meaning of the name in only two years. The name "Santa Cruz Mountain Boys" was legendary. The name represented good guys who did great things to help save the world from tyranny during World War II, but the three knuckle heads were quickly making something bad out of such a good name. They changed the name from the Santa Cruz Mountain Boys to the initials S-C-M-B. Scum indeed, as Jordi made the mistake of noticing and mentioning.

Jordi was what people would consider the fifty-pound weakling. He actually weighed more than that, but not much more, which made him an easy target for almost anybody, especially the SCMB.

He wasn't particularly good at anything, except taking abuse. He took whatever abuse was dished out and went on his way.

Jordi carried a briefcase instead of a backpack. The briefcase was the cause for quite a bit of abuse the first time he used it at school. Most everyone thought it was nerdy, even Ricky. But nobody knew that it was the only thing he had to carry his schoolwork in, as all of his other book bags and backpacks had been stolen or destroyed. The briefcase had a lock, and was waterproof, which proved useful when the SCMB dipped it in the toilet. Even then, Jordi kept a smile on his face when he got to history class. When the teacher collected homework, Jordi watched Bo's face as he opened his waterproof case and retrieved the report, which was clean and dry. Jordi made direct eye contact with Bo and said, "Where's yours?" Bo was hoping not to draw any attention to himself and sneak to the bathroom while the teacher collected the work. At the first hint of an incomplete, Mrs. Sinton demanded Bo's work. He told her he left it at home with his other homework. Mrs. Sinton sent Bo to two days of in-school detention.

After the detention ended, Bo waited outside the school for revenge. As Jordi walked out, Bo knocked him down, threw his briefcase in the dumpster, and began ruthlessly hitting Jordi.

Ricky quickly ran to help after hearing the bloodcurdling screams. He didn't know who the screams were coming from but figured they could only be from Jordi, now that Bo was off detention. He pulled Bo off of Jordi, who was yet again lying defenseless on the ground. Bo tried to pick a fight with Ricky, which proved to be a big mistake. At that time Bo didn't have his friends, but was overflowing with anger and tried swinging a couple of punches in Ricky's direction. Ricky dodged the wild and haphazard punches

and pinned Bo to the ground. Ricky made Bo apologize to Jordi before he let the bully go.

While Ricky had Bo pinned down with his hands behind his back, Ricky made Bo repeat what he said.

“Jordi, I’m sorry.”

“I would pick on somebody my own size, but there is nobody as small as me.”

“If I don’t leave you alone, Ricky will hang me on the flagpole by my underwear.”

“I wear pink dresses.”

Ricky never hurt Bo physically, but boy did he embarrass him. Ricky later figured it was the pink dresses part that really made Bo want revenge. Revenge or not, Ricky made it clear to stay away from Jordi.

Before that day, Ricky wasn’t really a close friend of Jordi’s. He grew tired of watching all of the abuse. He knew that Jordi could sometimes be annoying in class, but that was no reason for the daily terror. Ricky apologized to Jordi after the incident. He said he was sorry for not helping sooner and also sorry for sticking his nose into Jordi’s business. Jordi thanked him for the help and told Ricky he was the only real friend he had in years.

The boys’ conversation wound down as they noticed their teacher approaching the room. Mrs. Sinton entered the room and spoke to the class, “Students, use the next few minutes to prepare for your presentations.”

While she spoke, Bo ambled through the door headed for his desk. “So glad you could join us today, Mr. Batura, and earlier than normal I might add,” she commented.

“Thanks Mrs. Sinton. I’m a strong believer in the value of education. You know, a mind is a terrible thing to waste,” he smirked.

“You make that evident on so many levels!” she said.

CHAPTER 5

EVERYDAY HEROES

The students prepared for their presentations while Mrs. Sinton worked at her desk. This lesson in history would be different than most as the students were to give presentations on research papers they submitted a week earlier. The topic was “Everyday Heroes in our midst”.

Mrs. Sinton walked toward the board and spoke, “Alright class, I hope you’re prepared for your presentations. I doubt that we’ll be able to finish all of them today. If you don’t have the opportunity to present today, you’ll likely present tomorrow. I want to take our time on these, because this is a great opportunity to see how ordinary people can do extraordinary things,” said Mrs. Sinton.

Jordi leaned over to Ricky and whispered, “Are you ready?”

“Yeah, but I’m nervous. I’ve never been good at public speaking. My stomach is really churning!”

“Are you ready, though?”

“I guess so. Why?”

“When she asks for volunteers, raise your hand.”

“Jordi, are you crazy? Why would I do that?”

“Trust me, Ricky. The people that volunteer first always get graded easier. She kind of takes care of them that way.”

“Why?”

“Cause it makes her job easier. She doesn’t have to waste time selecting people. Plus it’s like a mental thing, if you raise your hand; she thinks you’re prepared and motivated. Teacher’s are really into that!”

“Are you sure? Because I’m so nervous I might just throw up!”

“Trust me! It’s better to volunteer!”

“Alright, Jordi, but I’m serious about being nauseous! I hate doing this kind of stuff.”

“Yeah, me too! I spent all last night psyching myself up for this. I feel ready now, so don’t go getting me scared again! I’ll go first.”

Mrs. Sinton began to address the class, “I was very pleased with your papers. Frankly, I found some of the papers very moving,” said Mrs. Sinton as Bo made a gesture mocking her. “And for some, I’m still waiting on your papers,” she said as she looked directly at Bo who conveniently looked down at the floor. “On that note, I would like to remind you all that this research assignment will have a significant impact on your overall grades. So, Mr. Batura, it would behoove you to complete the assignment if you don’t want to enjoy my classroom again next year.”

“Raise your hand if you want to volunteer to give your presentation first,” said Mrs. Sinton as she scanned the classroom.

Jordi’s hand quickly shot up, but Ricky wasn’t so enthusiastic. He apprehensively raised his hand with some assistance from Jordi. “Trust me, Ricky!”

“Only two? It’s very interesting that my volunteers authored two of the best written papers. As I mentioned earlier, one of the papers was particularly moving.”

Jordi began smiling brightly with the anticipation that she was speaking of his writing. Ricky sank deeper into his chair as he felt himself become the center of attention.

“Mr. Cardenez, in all my years of teaching, I’ve never been moved to tears from a students writing. You captured the essence of what a true hero is and the sacrifice that these heroes make for the common good of society. The voice in your paper spoke as if you had first hand experience in the life of this everyday hero.”

Bo yet again made a gesture and placed a piece of notebook paper against his nose as if it were a tissue. He smiled and whimpered until he saw Mrs. Sinton staring at him.

“What? My nose is runny?” he answered to her unending stare.

“Mr. Batura, do you like baseball?”

“Please Mrs. Sinton, you and I are old friends, call me Bo. I love baseball. Are we going to a game?”

“No, Mr. Batura that was your second strike. One more and you’re out of the game.”

Ricky was as low in his chair as he could be when she continued. “I was so proud of your writing that I called to tell your mother. She explained your situation to me. I’m so sorry, I just never knew!” Mrs. Sinton said as she walked over and placed her hand on his shoulder.

“Thanks, but please don’t talk about that right now. It’s kinda personal.”

“Certainly. Class, I’ll give you five minutes to put on your costumes. If you need to change in the restroom you may go now.”

Virtually the whole class except for Ricky, Jordi and Bo took the opportunity to change in the bathroom. While changing, Jordi looked over at Ricky and said, “What’s that all about?”

“I don’t know. I guess it’s about me not having a dad around and catching so much grief from him,” said Ricky while looking at Bo.

“What does that have to do with your presentation?”

“Not now, I’ll tell you later sometime.”

“Sure thing, Ricky.”

The students streamed in as Mrs. Sinton prepared herself at her desk. Ricky and Jordi checked their note cards and made final finishes on their costumes.

The reports focused on everyday heroes in California. Mrs. Sinton gave very little guidance for the project in order for the students to take ownership of their work. She told the class to choose whomever they wanted as long as the hero was a Californian and met some of her five traits of a hero. Those traits are: Hero’s put others ahead of themselves, protect those who can’t protect themselves, make the world a safer/better place, put service above reward, Hero’s don’t know they are hero’s

As the last couple of students took their seats, Mrs. Sinton called on Ricky and Jordi for their presentations. “Who wants to go first?”

Jordi quickly spoke up, “I do, Mrs. Sinton.”

“Alright Mr. Jordan, proceed whenever you’re ready.”

CHAPTER 6

JOE VIERRA'S RAIDERS

Jordi left his seat for the front of the class. When he reached the board, he apologetically explained his uniform and his character. "My hero is from the 1940's. World War II in particular. I tried to find a uniform from that era, but they aren't around anymore. This is an Army surplus uniform. It's kind of big on me, but it was the only one I could find," said Jordi pointing at the camouflage army uniform draping him like a shower robe. He looked like a little boy playing dress up in his fathers work suit. Though he rolled up the sleeves and pant legs, his fingers and shoes were barely visible as the uniform covered him like a wet blanket. Along the chalk board behind him, he placed actual World War II photos of his hero wearing the authentic Army uniform.

"It's just fine, dear," reassured Mrs. Sinton. "Start by telling us why you chose this person whenever you're ready."

"I chose Joe Vierra because he was a person who fought against the Germans during World War II. He and the many soldiers like him, helped end the holocaust where the Nazis slaughtered millions of Jews throughout Europe."

"Although we should all be thankful for these guys, I'm particularly thankful because I'm Jewish. I feel pretty lucky that our country had brave soldiers who were willing to fight for my freedoms so many years ago. They prevented Hitler from controlling the world and stopped the genocide of the Jews. I believe if it weren't for them, I might not be here today. That's why I chose Joe Vierra."

"Very well said, Mr. Jordan! Go ahead with your presentation."

"Okay."

"Hello, my name is Joe Vierra and I became an everyday hero during World War II. I nicknamed my Army unit The Santa Cruz Mountain Boys.

At the moment Jordi said The Santa Cruz Mountain Boys, Bo sharply blurted out, "SCMB-SCUM RULES!"

Mrs. Sinton responded quickly with, "Strike three, you're out! Go sit in the hall until I come get you."

Jordi was exhilarated by Bo's removal and continued his presentation, "As I was saying. I was the leader of the original Fighting 122nd Raiders. Like most people I believe that war is a horrible thing, but the alternative was to let Adolph Hitler and the Nazis control Europe and maybe the world."

"I didn't fully understand the war until my unit arrived in Europe. When we first arrived, I attended a briefing that described some of the Nazi activities. I learned about the horrors Jews were enduring at the hands of the Nazis."

"At first, I thought maybe it was just propaganda to make us fight harder, but then I saw the photos. I had never heard the words "concentration camp" until that day. At that briefing, spy photos of some of the concentration camp victims were shown. The old phrase that a picture is worth a thousand words doesn't begin to describe the horror I saw that day. Jews were being exterminated by the Nazis throughout Europe. By the end of World War II, the number of victims of the holocaust would surpass six million."

With that last statement, Jordi completely captured the attention of his audience and continued to tell the class about Joe Vierra and The Santa Cruz Mountain Boys. "During the war, I was the leader of the Fighting 122nd Raiders, a National Guard unit

primarily of guys from Santa Cruz. Our mission was to liberate the small town of Pizzutti, Italy, from German Army control. We raided the town in order to disrupt the Nazi supply lines.”

“Even though we were grossly outnumbered, we had a huge advantage over the Germans. We were mountain boys who knew the mountain life. We were born and raised in mountains almost exactly like the Pizzutti Mountains.”

“Things that we did for fun as kids helped us during our raids on the Nazis. We never thought our games of hide and seek and capture the flag would help keep us alive during a war.”

“Without a doubt, our greatest accomplishment was the fact that we all safely made it home from the war. Sometimes in life, necessity and desperation are the cause for some of the greatest inventions and ideas. The invention that helped us was one early form of the modern ski lift that I created in the mountains of Pizzutti.”

“During the war, my invention was used to help us during our raids on the German supply lines. The purpose of the invention was to quickly get my troops back to safety. Even though it was new during the war, some friends and I created a similar lift in the Santa Cruz Mountains years earlier.”

As teenagers, we used to slide down ropes with pulleys into Pot Belly Creek. That’s a huge water hole at the bottom of the mountain where the river meets the mountain streams. Together they form an enormous lagoon. The problem was that after splashing down into the lagoon, it seemed to take forever for us to get back up to the top and do it all over again.”

“Some friends and I thought about the problem and did some tinkering with the pulleys. We figured out if we added a couple more pulleys and brackets, they could be used to bring people back up the mountain really fast.”

“As a military leader, it was my job to be the first in and last out of a raid. After a while, the Germans figured out our movement plans and captured me, although only for a matter of minutes before the Santa Cruz Mountain Boys came to my rescue.”

“It was then that I realized we needed a change. That was too close a call for me. I noticed that the trees in the Pizzutti Mountains were over 100 feet high. We re-designed the creek pulley and put it to use right away. The creek pulley helped us continue our missions without being seen or heard again by the Germans.”

“After redesigning the creek pulley, we were able to get in and out of Pizzutti in a matter of minutes, which would have previously taken hours of hiking while evading the Germans.”

“This concludes my presentation on Joe Vierra, the original Santa Cruz Mountain Boy!” said Jordi as Mrs. Sinton smiled and shouted, “Bravo!”

“Thanks,” smiled Jordi.

“Mr. Jordan, how did you get your information for this assignment?”

“I got most of my information from the internet and also from interviewing Joe Vierra in person. He still lives in Santa Cruz. He’s pretty old now, but he said he still gets around. He told me that a lot of the original Santa Cruz Mountain Boys from World War II have died.

“Class, raise your hand if you’re familiar with the holocaust,” said Mrs. Sinton as the students raised their hands. “Most of you probably haven’t studied it yet, but it’s a topic that you’ll all become familiar with in the next couple of months. The holocaust

and World War II is our next unit in history, although Mr. Jordan's presentation makes me want to get started right away! Very well done, Mr. Jordan."

Jordi walked back to his table while trying not to trip over his costume that fell further with every step.

"Good job, Jordi!" said Ricky nervously getting his materials ready for the presentation.

"Thanks. I'm glad I put this uniform over my other clothes. If I hadn't, I'd be pretty embarrassed now!" laughed Jordi as he saw the camouflage pants hanging down at his ankles. "Good luck!" he wished Ricky.

Ricky walked to the front of the class and waited for Mrs. Sinton's instructions, "Introduce your hero, whenever you're ready, Ricky."

"Okay, but my presentation isn't as long as Jordi's. It's kind of brief because I didn't pick a specific person," he said.

"That'll be fine. It's about content quality, not quantity," she answered.

CHAPTER 7 THE FORGOTTEN HERO

“My everyday hero is the forgotten hero,” began Ricky who wore one of his father’s old blue fire fighting uniform shirts and a Santa Cruz Fire and Rescue ball cap. As he began speaking, he laid photos of fallen firefighters along the chalkboard. “As I said, I’m the forgotten hero. I have no particular name or face, but when you call for me, I’ll be there. You don’t know me, but you know my uniform. I put your safety and needs ahead of my own.”

“When duty calls, I take no consideration of your color, religion, or social status. My sense of duty leads me in spite of my fear. My arrival is anxiously awaited, yet my departure is silent and unnoticed on my way to help another.”

“I take on many roles under this one firefighting hat. Each situation places me in a different role. I can act as a rescuer, doctor, counselor, but regardless, a friend to all. I charge a burning building, while most rush out. I rush a raging current, while most seek dry land. In each situation I put your welfare ahead of my own.”

“Though I am the forgotten hero, I’m proud of my service. I left my family so I might comfort yours. Next time you call, rest assured, I or those who follow will always answer your call,” concluded Ricky as he turned to Mrs. Sinton who was trying to covertly dry her eyes.

She dropped her tissue and began clapping. She walked over and hugged Ricky who was now even more embarrassed. “Who can tell me who the everyday hero is?” she asked.

“One student in the back raised her hand and answered, “A Firefighter!”

“No. You’re close, but what’s unique about these firefighters you see on the board?” Mrs. Sinton asked.

Nobody answered, so she signaled to Ricky to give the answer, “They’re the fallen firefighters. The ones who died in the line of duty,” said Ricky as he collected the photos from the board.

“Boys and Girls, Ricky captured a collage of everyday heroes. They risk everything to help us in our greatest time of need. We thank them at the time they help us, but how soon we forget them go about our lives. How many of you have ever been helped by firefighters?” asked Mrs. Sinton as she saw most of the class raise their hands.

“Now out of those who raised their hands, how many of you remember the name of the firefighter who helped you?” she scanned the class again and saw no hands up. “The forgotten hero’s aren’t just the fallen, but they’re also the people answering the call for help everyday. The one’s who’ve been left behind to continue to answer the call to duty!” she said while looking at Ricky.

As Ricky walked back to the table, Mrs. Sinton sat back down at her desk and said, “Class, I apologize but we’ll have to continue the presentations tomorrow. To continue on would be a disservice to these wonderful heroes. Instead of continuing, I want you all to write a thank you letter to the forgotten hero. I’ll collect them tomorrow.”

Ricky got back to the table only to be greeted with, “Way to go Ricky! You did so great that we get more work!” said Jordi smiling.

“Sorry about that,” answered Ricky.

“No way, man, I’m just kidding. That was really great; I didn’t know you had it in you,”

“Thanks, but she’s making a big deal out of nothing. I just wrote how I felt.”

“That’s a cool uniform, how’d you get that?” asked Jordi.

“My mom got it for me,” said Ricky not volunteering anymore information. As proud as he was at his father’s heroic story, talking and thinking about it only seemed to freshen the painful feelings of knowing that he would never know his father.

The remaining time in history class mostly consisted of the students quietly working on the letters.

When class let out, Ricky and Jordi gathered their belongings and headed out the door. Unfortunately for Jordi, he forgot that Bo was still waiting outside the door. As Jordi crossed the threshold of the door, he was tripped as Bo stuck out his foot. Ricky noticed Bo’s foot was the cause of Jordi tripping. As Bo’s foot remained an obstruction, Ricky stepped on it in a not so comfortable manner and smiled.

“I’m sorry Bo; did I step on your foot? Man, you should really be more careful!” said Ricky.

Jordi forgot about his things scattered around the floor and began laughing hysterically. Bo jumped up quickly and lunged toward Jordi, only to be blocked by Mrs. Sinton.

“Have a seat at my desk until everyone leaves,” she said as she ushered him into the classroom.

Jordi knew it might cost him dearly later, but he continued laughing and cherishing one of the rare occasions that Bo got what he so readily dished out.

As Jordi and Ricky walked out of listening range of the classroom, Jordi said, “Thanks! Man, did you see the grimace on his face?”

“Yeah, but you and I both know stepping on his foot is like throwing gas on a fire. I’m sure he’s planning revenge right now,” answered Ricky.

“Either way, man, I appreciate it!” said Jordi.

“Well, I kind of did it for myself. When he tripped you, I suddenly remembered the pain in my hand. I wanted him to know how it felt. It was wrong, but for some strange reason, the pain in my hand felt a little better when he grimaced,” said Ricky while smiling.

“So what’s with all of this stuff that Mrs. Sinton was talking about?”

“I don’t know it’s just something that happened a long time ago. Talking about it only makes me feel worse.”

“I don’t understand, Ricky?”

“Jordi, you know how I look out for you sometimes and help you out with Bo and other people?”

“Yeah?”

“You could really help me out if you don’t ask me anymore. The only thing I’ll tell you is that something happened a long time ago that’s probably as painful to me as being bullied is to you.”

“Okay, I won’t ask you anymore, but promise you’ll tell me if I can ever help you with it.”

“Thanks, I promise.”

“Hey Ricky, I’m leaving early today because I have a dentist appointment. My mom usually lets me take the rest of the day off when I leave early?”

“This early?”

“Yeah, we usually go have lunch on the beach afterwards. I guess I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Later, Jordi,” said Ricky as he headed for class. The remainder of the day was uneventful. Throughout the day, Ricky thought about the letter that he’d write to his unforgotten hero, his father.

When the bell rang at the end of the day, Ricky went to the library. There, he took out a piece of paper and did something he had never done before. Wrote a letter to the father he’d never known.

CHAPTER 8

RICKY'S LETTER

Dear Dad,

My history teacher, Mrs. Sinton is having my class write letters to forgotten heroes. She gave us the assignment after I did a presentation on forgotten heroes. I think you'd be proud!

I'm not really sure where to start, because I've never done this before. Although we've never met, I feel like I know you well. Over the years, Mom has told me practically everything about you.

I think it's pretty cool that you were one of the Santa Cruz Mountain boys. Mom said that you joined the National Guard after your high school graduation. She said that you were pretty patriotic and wanted to give something back to the country. She said as a kid you watched the soldiers rescuing people during mudslides, earthquakes and wildfires and wanted to be just like them. I guess that's why you became a firefighter too!

I was born three months after you left. Mom said the original Santa Cruz Mountain Boys still living came to your memorial service. You were the first Santa Cruz Mountain Boy to make the ultimate sacrifice. Mom said lots of people came to the service, because I guess you've helped a lot of people over the years. The Santa Cruz Mountain Boys even shouted their war chant at the end of the service.

***FIGHT FOR FREEDOM,
STRONG AND POISED,
WE ARE THE SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAIN BOYS!***

At the service, Joe Vierra gave mom a box of unit memorabilia to give me when I was old enough to understand. She gave the stuff to me a few years ago. It helped me to learn more about you, but I don't think I'll ever understand. One of the things in the box was a lucky rabbit's foot. I'm not sure it's all that lucky though.

I tried to use it this morning, but it didn't really work. There are some bully's at school who are giving me a hard time. They gang up on me now, because I helped someone they were picking on. They try to make me fight them, but I'm not allowed. It would be so much easier to fight them, but I promised mom that I would grow up following your example. She said that you were the smartest person she ever knew and that you could "smart" your way out of bad situations.

I'm trying, but these guys are really wearing me down. I don't know how much longer I can "smart" my way out of fighting. I wish you were here to help, cause I'm really running out of ideas.

It's funny how we've never met face to face but we kind of know each other. Mom told me when she was pregnant with me, I would kick like crazy in her tummy when you'd talk to me. I know it probably sounds strange, but some of the songs you used to sing around the house are my favorites. I really love the Beach Boys music too!

Even though this letter is supposed to be written to a forgotten hero, you'll never be forgotten. Mom and I celebrate your birthday at the Dog House every year. She told me your favorite combo was the Chicago dog, chips and a Mountain Dew. That's what I usually order. We hang a Christmas stocking for you every year and celebrate every Father's Day. I hope it's not freaky; it just makes me feel closer to you.

The purpose of this letter is to say thanks, so I guess I need to get to that. Thanks for being a dad I'll always be proud of. Not too many kids get to say that! Thanks for taking great care of mom, and being a great role model for her to follow in raising me.

I've never been able to say it before, but thanks for rescuing those people. I used to get angry at you when I thought you chose them over us, but I know it was the only choice you could make. I hope if I was ever in your shoes I would have that much courage as well.

I feel like I should also apologize to you. I feel guilty for not telling the world that my dad is the hero from the Redwood City flood. I want to tell people, but it's just another reminder that I'll never have a chance to know you.

Though I'll never get to meet you, I often day dream about us hanging out together.

I guess I better go now. Thanks again for being a dad that I'm so proud of!

*Your son,
Ricky*

CHAPTER 9

THE HELPER

After finishing the letter, Ricky left the library headed for the front of the school. Most days, he usually talked with friends for a while before going home. As he walked out of the school he looked around and noticed the place was deserted. Ricky then looked at his watch and realized just how late it was. With nothing else to do, he started taking the lonely walk home.

These days he usually walked home with Jordi because the little guy wouldn't stand a chance walking alone. It also wasn't far out of the way from where Ricky lived, and he didn't have anybody to talk to once he got home. Aside from not having the chance to know his father, Rico, Ricky didn't get to see his mom very much. She worked crazy hours. He was normally home alone until about 7:00 p.m.

As Ricky turned the corner at the back of the school he passed the dumpsters. Suddenly, he was completely tripped off his feet by none other than the SCUM crew. Dazed from bumping his head on the dumpster, Ricky laid on the ground for a moment to catch his breath. Lying there, he watched helplessly as the SCMB boys threw his backpack in the dumpster.

Suddenly the gang took off in a flurry, laughing and yelling, "Don't mess with us again or you'll be in there with your bag next time."

Out of nowhere, a large man stood next to the dumpster and helped Ricky up. Using a stick, he fished at Ricky's bag trying to get it out of the dumpster for him.

"Thanks, but who are you?" Ricky asked as he rubbed the sore spot on his head.

"My name is Redhorse. I'm a helper here. Are you okay?"

"Yeah, my head kind of hurts, but I'm alright. My bag doesn't look alright though!" said Ricky as he looked into the dumpster and saw his bag covered with food remains from the cafeteria.

"Your bag will be okay my friend."

"Did you say your name is Redhorse?" asked Ricky.

"I did."

"That's a cool name. How'd you get it?" Ricky asked.

"Redhorse is my Native American name. Just like you, my father and mother named me."

"My father didn't name me. He died before I was born. It's just me and my mom."

"Someday you'll find that he did."

"Huh?"

"Why are those guys bothering you?"

"They're trying to make me fight them. They've been mad at me since I stuck up for a kid they were picking on. His name is Jordi, and he doesn't stand a chance against them."

"I saw them troubling you this morning. Was that about your friend, Jordi?"

"Pretty much," said Ricky. "But now they're leaving him alone and focusing on me. I've been able to handle it, but it's starting to get to me. They say I'm a sissy girl and stuff like that. It kind of brings up sad memories for me."

“You are a warrior my friend. Anyone who defends someone that can’t help them self and tries to make peace is the bravest of warriors.”

“I don’t know what I am. I just wish I could get away from it all sometimes. It’s the same thing everyday,” said Ricky.

The old man finally fished Ricky’s bag out and said, “This is pretty messy, let’s go back in the school and clean it up. I have something in the school to give you.”

“Huh?” Ricky whispered to himself.

“I have something that will help you get away.”

The two walked back into the school to the boiler room, where the janitors’ offices were. Redhorse cleaned off the book bag and handed it back to Ricky.

“I told you I had something for you.”

Saying this, the old man opened the desk drawer and pulled out a colorfully painted wooden box. It was decorated with what looked like Native American etchings. Ricky noticed a shimmer escaping the box. He became more curious as the old man opened the box. The man took something out and turned back to Ricky.

“It is your destiny to be the carrier. You are a warrior for peace, which sometimes takes more strength and courage than fighting, especially when you are doing it for someone else.”

As the old man turned, Ricky noticed that what he took out of the box appeared to be a feather.

“The moment is now for the next journey of the messenger’s feather,” said the old man.

Ricky’s eyes became transfixed on the feather that was as white as freshly fallen snow.

“Here my friend,” said Redhorse, as he placed the feather in Ricky’s hand. As the feather rested in his hand, Ricky felt an instantaneous peace envelope him. He became totally captured by its presence. The feather had a texture unlike anything that Ricky had ever touched. Although the lighting in the room was dim, Ricky noticed that a shine emanated from it.

“What type of bird is this from?” asked Ricky as his curiosity grew.

“It is not from a bird, my friend,” answered Redhorse.

“Then what’s it from?”

“It is a feather from the mighty wing of a messenger of the great maker.”

“Huh?”

Redhorse began to tell Ricky the story about an Angel that visited a peasant over a thousand years earlier in the land that is today called Mexico.

CHAPTER 10

THE ANGEL OF PEACE

“Many generations ago. Long before lands were claimed and divided between individuals. There was a man who was an unjust, greed filled tribal leader. He carried a dark heart with plans to capture nearby tribal natives and kill their leaders. He schemed to use the neighboring tribes to labor a new kingdom for his pleasure and glory. The evil leader laid out an elaborate ruse to ensnare other tribes. He invited neighboring peoples to a peace treaty and feast. The tribes had been at odds with each other for generations and sought peace.

Late one night in the hut of a lowly peasant of one of the tribes, an Angel of peace from the great maker visited.”

“Like a real Angel? Floppy wings and everything?”

“Yes, my friend.” Redhorse answered as he retold the story of the angel’s feather.

“Behold,” the Angel spoke. “I bring you word from the great maker.”

“Who are you?” asked the peasant.

“I am a messenger of peace. I have come to warn you of great danger to you and your people.”

“Danger? What danger?” he asked.

“An evil plan exists to harm you and your people. If you go to the great feast, you will certainly be killed or enslaved. The feast is a trap. It is an evil snare where the tribal leaders will be killed and the tribesmen will be made slaves.”

“Why?”

“Because evil has entered the lands and has darkened hearts with selfishness and greed.”

“Why are you not telling the tribal leaders? Why me? I am just a peasant.”

“You have been chosen,” spoke the Angel. “Chosen to speak the truth and tell all of the tribes of this evil plan.”

“I am nobody. I am not strong and powerful. I don’t rule with the leaders. No one will believe what I say. They will kill me for speaking such foolishness,” the peasant desperately pleaded.

“You were chosen because your heart is pure. You hold no selfishness or greed in your heart. The tribal leaders will fall prey to shining gifts of gold and jewels that will blur their judgment.”

“How will I know this is real? How will I know that this is not just a dream?”

“When you awake tomorrow, a sign will be provided and you will know this meeting to be true,” answered the Angel.

“They will surely kill me if I speak out against the banquet of peace,” the peasant pleaded.

“No harm will come to you. I, and others have been sent to protect you. As long as you carry the sign that I leave with you, no one can bring harm to you. You will be rewarded greatly for your steadfast courage. Your descendants for many generations to come will know prosperity because of you.”

“What am I to do?” he asked.

“Tell the faithful from the tribes to follow you to lands yet known. There you will find new homes and crops with yields greater than you have ever harvested.”

“What is to happen to all the tribesmen that do not heed?”

“They will be enslaved or killed. One day, you and those that follow your lead will rise up and lead them to freedom. A curse will fall upon the land of dark hearts. Crops will soon not grow there. They will grow hungry and weary. When the evildoers become weary, they will try to lure you with gifts of fine gold’s, jewels, and linens. Do not let the greed of their hearts fall upon you. The land you will inhabit will overflow with peace and prosperity.

CHAPTER 11

THE CARRIER

“And so my friend,” Redhorse continued. “When the peasant awoke in the morning. He noticed this feather resting next to his head. Not having seen it before, he took hold of it just as you are, and became blanketed in peacefulness.”

“What did he do?” asked Ricky.

“He began going through the villages and warning all who would listen of the evil plan.”

“Then what happened? Did they try to kill him?” asked Ricky.

“Yes, my friend. Many who heard the story did not listen and some tried to bring harm to him. But as the messenger promised he was surely protected. Any who tried to bring harm to him instantaneously fell sick. And just as the messenger spoke, the tribal leaders became blurred in judgment with gifts of gold, jewels, and linens.

The night of the great feast of peace, he and a few followers ventured into lands unknown. As they left the village, they were mocked and ridiculed by the tribesmen that they would one day lead to freedom.”

“What happened after that?” inquired Ricky.

“They claimed the land of prosperity which overflowed with mighty harvests until he was again visited by the messenger who commanded him and his tribe to go to the land of dark hearts and liberate the oppressed.

“As he entered the land of dark hearts, he was welcomed by misery and sadness. A dark kingdom had been purchased and built by the pain of his people. He saw statues and idols that paid homage to the evil leader, but even they were tarnished and decayed. He was lured with fine gifts, but denied himself and demanded freedom for his people.”

“Yet again this man who was small in stature yet full of courage was targeted for harm by those of dark hearts.”

“Did he get hurt?”

“No my friend. Just as he was promised, the messenger and others were sent to protect him.”

“That is so cool. What happened with the feather after that?” asked Ricky.

“Just as the messenger had promised. Generations of his descendants prospered because of his steadfastness. He and the generations that followed him were permitted to keep and protect the feather of miracles for over a thousand years. Only his descendants can receive the feather. You have been chosen as the next carrier of the feather, my friend. Are you ready to receive the feather and become the carrier?” asked Redhorse.

“Are you kidding me? That peasant is one of my ancestors?” asked Ricky.

“Indeed, my friend.”

“Why me? I’m not a big shot or anything like that.”

“It is the fulfillment of a promise to honor his descendants.”

“Yea, but still. Why me?”

“He has other ancestors my friend. Just as his, your life has been an open book for others to guide upon.”

“I don’t understand this. Maybe I hit my head harder than I thought,” questioned Ricky to himself.

“You are fine, my friend. Hold the feather as I turn off the light,” said Redhorse as the feather instantly provided light to the completely darkened room. “This feather is meant to bring light to the world in many ways.”

“Mr. Redhorse, I don’t mean to sound disrespectful, but this is kind of scaring me. I mean, at first the story was interesting, but now you’ve got to level with me.”

“You are now the carrier until the feather is called to another journey.”

“What am I supposed to do with it?” asked Ricky.

“Your first journey with the Angel’s feather is to use it as a bookmark. It has the power to show you worlds that you’ve never imagined. Use it carefully during your adventures, my friend. It shall never be used for selfishness or greed. Great danger awaits those who would misuse the gift,” the old man said.

“What adventures?” said Ricky.

“This is a living bookmark. If you really want to get away as you said, put this in the book, and you will live the book, my friend. Make sure you always keep it in your hands during the adventure. If you lose it, you may face great danger.”

“How is it a living bookmark?”

“When you decide to adventure, place the feather in the book and close your eyes. Imagine yourself being in that part of the book and your adventure will begin. As you open your eyes, you will see that you are living the book.”

“Who put you up to this?” asked Ricky as he had finally received too much information.

“No, my friend. You are now the carrier.”

“Carrier?”

“As I said, you are now the carrier of the power.”

“If I go into a book, how do I get out of it?” said Ricky trying to play along with the joke. He enjoyed hearing the story and watching the feather light up, but figured that a lighting feather was probably a gimmick or trick that could be purchased at a practical joke or magic store.

Enough is enough, Ricky thought as he had been entertained thoroughly, but now needed some closure.

“To complete your adventure, close your eyes and imagine leaving the book. Then you will return.”

Not sure if the old man was a nut or just part of some practical joke being played, Ricky stood respectfully and said “Thank you,” as he continued to hold the mysterious feather. True story or not he would soon find out. At this point, he definitely wanted to get away from this situation. He again respectfully smiled, nodded his head, and waved goodbye to the seemingly kind stranger. While walking out of the building manager’s office, Ricky continued to study the feather with wonder.

The old man’s last words were, “Be very careful, my friend.”

Ricky looked at the feather and again said, “Thank you.”

While walking home, Ricky continued to wonder about the feather, the old man and the story he had been told about the feather’s power. He also kept wondering what kind of powers it had as a bookmark if this wasn’t some type of practical joke being played on him.

CHAPTER 12

THE ADVENTURE BEGINS

Upon arriving home Ricky began his normal routine of letting the dog outside and fixing himself a snack. He took his snack outside, sat down and relived the day's events in his mind. From the before school harassment, to the aid from the mysterious stranger. This was likely the strangest of days for him and it was only four o'clock. The more he thought about it, the more curiosity grew within him. Who was the mysterious old man at the school that Ricky had never seen before?

"It is a living bookmark young warrior," Ricky mocked and mimicked the old man's voice. He chuckled as he thought about the absurdity of the whole situation.

The biggest question in Ricky's mind was who was playing this joke on him. It couldn't be Bo and the SCMB; the old man chased them off. Mr. Titus, the Principal was a very nice guy, but never seemed to have much of a sense of humor.

Ricky ran inside the house and got the phone book. He rummaged through the pages until he found the listing for the magic stores in town. It did not take him long to quickly find that the town was in dire need of re-supply of feathers that light up as flashlights as no stores carried such an item.

He resolved himself to put off discovering who the prankster was until he got to school the next day. After finishing his snack, Ricky went back inside the house and retrieved his backpack. He took his backpack outside to work on his homework. Ricky emptied the backpack of its contents and began doing his homework. While working on his homework, he noticed the tip of the supposed mysterious, magical feather peaking out of the backpack. "Be careful how you use it my friend, selfishness and greed can cause danger," mocked Ricky in the slow, serious voice.

Ricky took the bookmark out of his bag, held it and stared at it. The uniqueness and beauty of the feather held his attention for a few moments until he realized that he was again being sucked into the prank. He laughed at himself and felt like an idiot for almost falling for it. He laid the feather down on his California history book and began his math homework.

Other than making an occasional glance at the feather, he paid no more attention to it until his dog Gunner became bored with the backyard and moseyed over to snuggle next to Ricky.

As Gunner moved close to Ricky he sensed something at the patio table. Gunner stood on his hind legs while two paws rested on the table. He only momentarily sniffed at the feather before acting terror struck, whined and backed away.

"What's the matter boy? It's okay! Come're," responded Ricky.

Ricky reached out for the dog, but was unsuccessful in calming his fears as Gunner backed himself into his doghouse. "Am I losing my mind or what?" Ricky asked, as he was unable to coax his normally fearless dog out of the doghouse.

Ricky's total attention turned to the feather and how ridiculous the whole situation was. "Now Gunner, I know you're not playing a joke on me."

The skeptic now with feather in hand starred at it with grand curiosity and anticipation. "Living bookmark, huh? We'll see!" said Ricky aloud as his eyes met up with the feather and the California History book. Aside from the report on everyday heroes, his California history class was now studying World War II. In particular, the

current reading assignment was on the effects of World War II on the California economy and famous Californians during the war.

While Gunner hid in the doghouse, Ricky introduced the book and feather to each other in a ceremonious manner. "I am the carrier!" he shouted. "Visualize yourself in that part of the book and you'll live it!" He closed his eyes and mocked. "Let me be a part of this book!" he bellowed as he closed the book holding the feather captive in the World War II section.

KABOOM! "AAArrgggghhhhhh! Grunted Ricky as he was suddenly knocked off his feet and flying through the air.

"Ow", moaned Ricky as he rolled over trying to figure out what just happened. He felt like a bus had just hit him.

"Lie still. You're going to be okay pal. Me American!" whispered a stranger leaning over Ricky while checking him out.

"Where am I? What happened?" asked Ricky.

"You speak English?" asked the stranger.

"Of course I do! Who are you?"

"I'm Joe. I'm an American soldier. My soldiers and I are here to liberate your town from the German army."

"What are you talking about? What happened?" asked Ricky growing confused and frustrated and trying to sit up.

"It was a grenade. The krauts threw a grenade over this way. The explosion blew the door off its hinges and took you with it." Ricky looked at the door that was splintered and in pieces. "You're lucky that you were standing on this side of that door. You would have been history on the other side."

"History? Krauts?" mumbled Ricky to himself as he realized he was actually in his Cal-history book.

"Yeah, the Germans, Nazis."

"Nazis? What's going on?" asked Ricky.

"What's going on is the Nazis are occupying Pizzutti. My soldiers and I are here to liberate you all. They're looking for us right now. I got separated from my troops, and they're searching all over the area."

Ricky still confused asked, "Who are you? I need to go home!" he desperately pleaded.

"The name's Joe, Joe Vierra. I'm an American soldier. I'll get you home buddy, but there's something I've gotta do first."

"Joe Vierra! That bookmark mumbo jumbo is true!" said Ricky as he realized what part of the history book he was in. This was the part where the Nazis capture Joe until the Santa Cruz Mountain boys rescue him.

"Not so loud!" urged Joe. "The Germans are all over. It's only a matter of time until they find us. I'm just hoping that my guys can get to me before they do."

Ricky sat up, looked around and saw that he was sitting next to some kind of storage building. He looked over at Joe and saw something in Joe's hand. "What's that?" Ricky asked as he noticed a small square box with a button in the middle. The box was connected to a wire hidden under the dirt.

"This is a switch to a booby trap. Do you see that building over there with all of the guards standing around it?"

“Yeah?” answered Ricky.

“We wired it with explosives last night. That building is where they keep all of their weapons and explosives. This is one of the German supply points. My mission is to blow it up,” answered Joe.

“Weapons and explosives?” mumbled Ricky.

“Yeah, the bombs they use against the good guys,” answered Joe.

“I can’t believe this is happening!” said Ricky.

“Believe it buddy. Blowing up that weapons bunker will save lives. The Germans will have fewer weapons to use against the good guys. If you only new the horrors that they are doing to people in other places!”

“Do you mean what they’re doing to the Jews? The concentration camps?” asked Ricky.

“Yeah, but how do you know about that? That’s top secret information!” asked Joe.

“Trust me I know how evil Hitler and those people are,” answered Ricky.

“Are you a part of the resistance network?” asked Joe.

Ricky thought about the question and gave the only answer that any decent human being could give, “Yes, isn’t everybody?”

“Not everybody, but there’s a lot more good people than bad. Blowing up that building will even out the odds for the resistance to fight the Nazis here.

Ricky thought about the Holocaust pictures in his History book and asked, “What can I do to help?”

“Help me accomplish my mission. No matter what happens to me, we have to blow that building. I don’t know where my soldiers are, and I can’t accomplish my mission alone.”

“HALT!” was shouted as Ricky found himself and Joe suddenly at the wrong end of a German machine gun. “LEUTNANT! KOMMEN SIE HIER!” The soldier shouted.

Ricky noticed that Joe laid the switch on the floor and raised his hands as if surrendering. “Let the kid go, he’s not with me! He’s just a local yokel from Pizzutti!” shouted Joe.

“RUHIG!” shouted the German soldier.

Ricky noticed that the German soldier seemed distracted while trying to understand Joe’s English. Out of the corner of his eye, Ricky saw the switch on the floor and wondered how many lives would be saved if the Nazis were left without the weapons and ammunition in that booby-trapped building.

While the German soldier remained focused on Vierra, Ricky slowly slid his left foot until it was directly against the switch. With the switch lying next to Ricky’s left foot, he slowly dragged his right foot until the switch lie wedged between his shoes. Ricky was ready to push the button. He waited for Joe to give him the signal to initiate the fuse on the charge. Joe saw Ricky gradually slide his foot over to the switch and began to slowly move himself away from Ricky, much to the displeasure of the German.

“HALT! HALT!” The Nazi shouted.

“No problem. I’m halting. I surrender! Hit the switch whenever you’re ready kid. It’s a three second fuse. I’ll hit the ground when you do.

“RUHIG!” shouted the soldier.

“Ricky swallowed the big lump in his throat and said, “Excuse me sir?”

“WAS?” asked the irritated Nazi.

“THIS IS FOR JORDI!” Yelled Ricky as he dove to the ground. Joe followed his lead, which only seemed to confuse the German soldier even more.

“STEHEN!” The enemy soldier shouted just before he was lifted off of his feet by the blast.

“It worked!” shouted Ricky.

“Yeah, but that was just our stuff. When their stuff blows, there won’t be anything left of this place. We’ve got to get out of here! My troops and I have a meeting point at the base of the mountain. Where are you going?” asked Joe.

“Home as fast as I can!” answered Ricky.

“Good luck pal. If you need to go with us and hold out for a while, we sure owe you one!

“No thanks, I better get home and make sure everything’s okay there.”

“Thanks a lot pal! What you did today has saved a lot of innocent lives, including mine! Hope to see you again someday,” yelled Joe.

“Same here!”

Ricky and Joe took off in opposite directions. Joe ran toward the hills, while Ricky clutched the book and prayed that he would make it back home. “Here goes nothing,” whispered Ricky as he visualized himself back at home.

Instantly he felt the comfortable contact of the deck chair against his back. Freaked out about the experience, Ricky in a knee-jerk reaction threw the book with the feather on the table. He did not want to risk getting caught up in another adventure. As the book landed on the table, it opened up and the feather fell to the ground. The feather landed in a small mud puddle that was the result of the garden sprinklers. Ricky stared at the feather in the puddle and saw that the murkiness seemed to clear on contact with the feather. Almost instantly the murky mud puddle became as clear as drinking water. Ricky reached down and picked it up. Though it had fallen into the puddle, the feather seemed to miraculously maintain its snow-white appearance. After sitting momentarily trying to use logic to understand what just happened to him, Ricky stood up and paced around the table. Gunner only whined again and hid his paws over his eyes.

“Am I nuts Gunner or did that really happen?” questioned Ricky. “Should I call the authorities about this? Who would I call and who would believe me if I told them that I have an angel’s feather that can be used as a living bookmark? They would lock me up in the loony bin or something. Could I be going crazy, Gunner? I felt okay this morning.”

Ricky quickly contemplated trying the bookmark again to prove to him self that he wasn’t crazy, but decided not to do it again by himself. Ricky zipped the feather back in his backpack.

“Gunner, I’m gonna find that Redhorse guy and get to the bottom of this,” shouted Ricky as he hopped on his bike headed back to school.

The short ride to school caused Ricky to replay the bookmark experience over and over. He could reach no logical reason for the experience other than maybe he hit his head on the dumpster harder than he thought. He wondered if he should ride himself to the hospital, but again figured that anyone he told would think he was nuts.

Ricky reached the school only to find the parking lot deserted and the school

doors locked. He headed back home to try and make sense out of the situation. Ricky tried keeping it bottled up inside, but finally decided to call the only person that would probably believe him. Even though it sounded nuts, Jordi would at least hear him out. Unfortunately for Ricky, Jordi was not home yet from his dentist appointment and Ricky sure was not going to leave a message.

Ricky leaned back in his chair and took several deep breaths absorbing this new reality. "I can't believe that I actually met Joe Vierra and helped blow up a Nazi weapons bunker!"

CHAPTER 13

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN YOU'RE CRAZY?

Though he could not stand the wait, Ricky tried to put it all out of his head until he could talk to Jordi about it face to face. Ricky figured that if he ever were to purposely try a bookmark adventure again, the perfect person to go with him would be Jordi. He certainly did not want to go it alone again. Ricky planned to tell Jordi just a little bit during lunch period and then take him on an adventure after school.

He put the bookmark in his secret hiding place on the top shelf of his closet where his mom let him keep some of his dad's belongings. After putting it away, he went about doing his daily routine, which included homework and walking the dog before his mom got home.

After dinner they went over his homework and watched some television. Still somewhat confused at the day's events, Ricky asked, "How do you know if you're crazy?"

"What?" his mom asked.

"How do you know if you're going nuts or something? Has something happened that made you wonder if you were crazy?"

"What's going on Ricky?" she asked.

"Nothing, it's just that something weird happened, and I'm kind of wondering now if it really happened after all," he answered.

"You're not doing drugs are you son? Please tell me you're not!"

"It's not drugs, mom. It's something at school. I'm just wondering if there's some sort of sign you see before you're officially crazy."

"Of course, son!" she said with a serious face. "You ask your mom if you're crazy."

"Really?" he asked.

"No, not really! You're in a very stressful period of your life. Adolescence is one of the most exciting times, but that excitement also brings challenges and frustrations. I don't know what happened, and I'm not going to ask. I trust you, son."

"Thanks."

"But I also trust that you'll tell me if you ever need somebody to talk to."

"Thanks, Mom. How about you?"

"How about me, what?"

"Do you ever have times when you need someone to talk to?"

"Actually I do. I've been having strange dreams lately."

"What kind of dreams?"

"Dreams that wake me up feeling sad."

"I don't understand?"

"They're great while I'm asleep, but when I wake up, I realize that it's just a dream and I just feel down."

"Why?"

"Because, your dad's in the dreams. It seems so real then I wake up and realize I'm dreaming again."

Ricky suddenly started acting like a psychiatrist and spoke in a foreign sounding accent, "tell me about zese dreams you are aving!"

Anna played along and answered, “Well doctor, they started out simple. I saw a feather floating in the sky. It doesn’t land. It just seems to float. That wasn’t such a big deal, until the dream changed a couple days ago, and the now feather finally floats toward the ground.”

“Then what happens?”

“That’s where it puzzles me. As the feather floats, your father leans out of a window and catches it. He looks at the feather and then back in my direction and smiles. That’s where the dream ends. I wake up and remember that he’s gone. It’s so puzzling. I can’t figure out why I keep having the same dream every time I sleep.”

Ricky sat up and leaned in closer with a much more serious tone and asked, “Does he say anything?”

“No, he just smiles the way that only Rico can smile.”

“What do you think it all means?” asked Ricky who was unsure if there was a connection between the bookmark and Anna’s dream.

“I don’t know, son. I’ve had dreams about him before, but that was so long ago. It’s just strange that it’s been happening every night.”

“Yeah, it is.”

“Do you see how clever you are? We go from talking about you, to totally talking about me.”

“I’m okay mom, something big happened and now I’m wondering if it happened at all or if I’m going crazy.”

“So, tell me about it, son.”

“I’d rather not tell you, but promise that it’s nothing that you should worry about? I’m not doing drugs or anything like that.”

“Do you promise?”

“I promise, mom!”

“Pinky promise?”

“Yes mom, pinky promise!”

“Good.”

“So I’m okay then?” asked Ricky.

“You’re fine. “Ricardo,” she saved this name for only the most serious occasions. “Like I told you before, middle school and adolescence are such difficult times for guys. Your voice changes, you get zits and girlfriends. You are a perfectly healthy, normal guy. Cut yourself some slack, but promise me that you know you can talk to me about anything. I know that I’m your mom and I’m a girl, but you’re my baby. You can tell me anything.”

“Thanks, mom. I guess that’s what I’m doing now.”

“Okay, Ricky.”

“Mom?”

“Yeah?”

“Why did he do it?”

“Who, did what?”

“Why did dad rescue those people when he knew he wouldn’t make it?”

“That was the kind of person he was. He lived his life for others. As much as it hurts, I’m proud of him for that.”

“I’m proud of him too; I just wish he lived for me!”

CHAPTER 14

DAY TWO AND JORDI

It was probably the longest night of Ricky's life. The questions about being crazy continued to jet through his brain, as well as whether he should tell his mom or not. There were so many books flowing through his mind, he thought he would go crazy if he could not tell somebody about it soon.

Ricky was off to school much earlier than normal. He realized it was only 6:30, but he was willing to wait outside Jordi's house until Mr. Jordan walked out to get the paper on his way to work. Ricky tried waiting to tell Jordi, but he just couldn't hold off until school started.

"Hello, Ricky, how's it goin' this mornin'? What are you doing up so early?" asked Jordi's dad.

"Hi. There's something I need to talk to Jordi about."

"It must be real important if you're here this early. He's still up in his room. Go on in and help yourself to some breakfast if you'd like."

"Thanks."

"Hey, Ricky thanks again for looking out for Jordi. He told us you really took care of those bullies for him."

"That's what friends are for, Mr. Jordan," Ricky said modestly as he thought about the daily price he paid for Jordi's safety.

After talking to Mr. Jordan, Ricky ran upstairs to Jordi's room and woke him up. "Dude, you are never going to believe what I have!"

"Let me go back to sleep," moaned Jordi.

"Get out of bed, man. I've got something that's going to blow your mind!" said Ricky. "Dude, have you seen the building manager's new helper at school? He gave me something yesterday that's been passed down from my ancestors for over a thousand years. You gotta wake up for this. I didn't sleep a wink last night because I was going nuts wanting to tell somebody about it. Redhorse was telling the truth and I gotta show you."

"Red who?"

"Our building manager's new helper gave me an feather, man," said Ricky. "You gotta see it."

"Wow, a real feather? Show me in about an hour when I wake up," said Jordi, becoming irritated.

"Guess what kind of feather it is?" begged Ricky.

"What kind?" groaned Jordi as he tried to further burry his head in his pillow.

"An angel's feather. A feather from an angel's wing. I didn't believe it. I swear I didn't, but it's true!" asserted Ricky. "It's a living bookmark that does wild things! We asked for some kind of magic or help, and now we've got it!"

"You go to church. Do you know anything about angels?" asked Ricky.

"I go to a synagogue. But yeah, I know a lot about them," answered Jordi.

"Have you ever seen one, or at least an angels feather?" asked Ricky.

"Now you're scaring me, Ricky," cautioned Jordi.

“Do you believe in angels?”

“I don’t know. I guess so. I mean, I haven’t ever seen one that I know of. But then again I haven’t ever seen the wind, but I know it’s there because of the effect it has on things.

“I’m totally serious about this,” urged Ricky.

Jordi, now giving up on going back to sleep, finally surrendered and asked, “What kind of stuff does it do?”

“When you use it as a bookmark, it can make you become a part of the story. It sounds nuts, but it’s true. Honest to goodness.”

“Okay, Ricky, the jokes over, you got me. Ha, ha! Yeah, I believe that about as much as Bo and the boys believed me when I told them I earned my black belt in Karate over the summer. I remember it clearly. They had me in a corner when I had nothing to lose by telling them. Before I knew it, I was standing in the crane position trying to fool em’ and look like the Karate Kid. The next thing I remember is being on the ground with my briefcase plastered to my face. I swear it took almost a week for the “Samsonite” imprint on my forehead to wear off.”

Feeling guilty for laughing, Ricky just said, “Yeah, but what did you expect when you tell the three biggest jerks in the school you’re going to waste them with karate from that old movie?”

Both boys jumped into the crane position and howled at the memory.

“Jordi, I swear that I’m telling the truth. I wouldn’t joke about something like this. Seriously, put your school clothes on and I’ll show you.”

While Jordi got dressed, Ricky went downstairs to the Jordan family library. With so many books to choose from, Ricky finally settled on a children’s fairly tale collection. “*The Three Little Pigs* should do just fine,” Ricky said. He picked this story because he didn’t want to completely freak Jordi out.

When Jordi came downstairs, they went to the living room where Ricky gave Jordi instructions. “*The Three Little Pigs*! Come on, Ricky; I may not be a tough guy, but don’t insult me! If we’re gonna play this game, why don’t we use Treasure Island with cool pirate battles and blood and guts?” said Jordi in a mocking manner.

“Three pigs or not, this is going to blow you away! Trust me, Jordi, when you see what happens, blood and guts is the last thing you’ll want.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” mocked Jordi.

“Serious, Jordi. I almost got stuck in our history book. I’m still freaked out by this. I kind of feel like I’m losing my mind. Really, I just want to show you what I’m talking about. In and out real fast. We can’t stay in too long, ‘cause I don’t know if there’s a time limit.”

“Oh, please, Ricky, why are you doing this to me?”

“You’ll see. Are you ready?”

“Ready,” laughed Jordi.

“Whatever you do, visualize being in the pigs house made of bricks. I don’t want to have to explain to your parents that you were eaten by the big bad wolf!”

“Gimme a break!”

“You’ll see. Are you Ready?”

“Yep. You know I’m just playing along with you don’t you?”

“You’ll see soon enough. Even though you don’t believe me, promise me you’ll visualize what I told you,” asked Ricky.

“I promise. I’m ready if you are,” answered Jordi while giggling under his breath.

“One, two, three.”

With all eyes closed, the next thing they heard was, “I’ll huff, and I’ll puff, and I’ll blow your house down.”

They both opened their eyes in shock and saw the smart little pig smiling at the door and laughing at the big bad wolf.

Jordi quickly whispered under his breath, “Holy cow, what happened?”

“What do you think happened? I told you this is no joke.”

“Where are we?”

“We’re in the book?”

“Who are you? How’d you get in my house?” asked the pig as he scrambled around his house double-checking the doors and windows.

“A talking pig? Am I losing it? Ricky, what’s going on?” asked Jordi in desperation.

“What’s going on is exactly what I told you Jordi! We’re in the book! Hi! I’m Ricky, and this is my friend, Jordi. Don’t worry about us, we’re friends not foes!” reassured Ricky.

“Yeah man, or Pig, we’re friendly. Nice sturdy house! Been busy building, huh?” Jordi always had a flare for witty remarks, even when he was in total shock.

Jordi took a quick peek out the window in time to see the frustrated wolf storming around the brick house trying to find a way in. “Hey Ricky, am I nuts, or are we really here?”

“We’re really here.”

“Can we get out of here, I’m getting weirded out?”

“See what I mean? Grab the book. Good luck with the wolf!” said Ricky to the pig.

As fast as they were in, they were back in the Jordan family library, just like a flash. They both looked at each other and didn’t say a word for a couple minutes. Ricky finally smiled at Jordi’s awestruck face and asked, “Do you believe me now?”

“Is this really happening?” asked Jordi.

“Yes! Isn’t it cool? Yesterday I went into our Cal-history book. Talk about a history lesson. I thought I was going to wet my pants!”

“I feel like I’m about to right now,” said Jordi in a subdued manner.

“Jordi, I actually met Joe Vierra in Pizzutti! He booby-trapped some Nazi weapons bunker and I blew it up. Then we escaped!”

“You got to fight the Nazis with the Santa Cruz Mountain Boys?” asked Jordi.

“Yeah, isn’t it cool?”

“Ricky, this is making my head spin! Why you, Ricky? I mean who is this Redhorse, and why would he give something like this to you?”

“I think Redhorse is the new assistant building manager. He told me that he was a helper. I don’t really know why he gave it to me, but he said that I’m some sort of carrier now. He said that it is the fulfillment of a promise to one of my ancestors. At first, I thought he was just a crazy old man, but then I tried it and it worked.”

“Were you scared?”

“Not really, I didn’t believe it was going to work. I thought somebody was playing a joke on me. After a while, my curiosity grew so much that I had to try it. I put the feather in the World War II section of our book that told about Joe Vierra and the Santa Cruz Mountain Boys. After I closed the book, I pictured your everyday heroes presentation. The next thing I know is that I was knocked off my feet from the blast of a grenade. Then I was really scared, especially after the Nazi soldier held me at gunpoint!”

“Ricky, you have something with power beyond our imaginations!”

“I know, but why me? I mean, what’s the purpose?” asked Ricky.

“I guess we have to wait and see, huh?” answered Jordi.

“I guess so.”

“Can we try another book?” asked Jordi who now seemed comfortable with the bookmark idea.

“I don’t know, Jordi. I’m not sure that’s a good idea. We still don’t know enough about this. I mean, what if there’s some sort of time limit on this? Then what, we end up stuck in a book somewhere.” answered Ricky.

“The person who gave it to you told you to use it, right?”

“Well, yeah, but.”

“No buts, Ricky. My life could sure use some excitement other than getting beaten up by the SCMB. That guy would have told you, don’t you think?” asked Jordi.

“Maybe, but I don’t know.”

“Come on Ricky, just one more quick adventure and then we head off to school!” begged Jordi.

“Really fast?” asked Ricky.

“Yes, I promise!” answered Jordi.

“I guess so. It’s not like my life is overflowing with excitement either. What book?” asked Ricky.

“*The Max Broadwater Experience*,” said Jordi as he took the book off the shelf.

“Why this one, you’ve never been into sports?”

“I know that’s the funny thing. I got this book after my dad walked into my room a couple months ago and caught me crying.”

“Caught you crying?”

“Yeah, I was totally at my wits end with the bullying thing. I felt completely trapped, because I knew the bullying wasn’t going to get better.”

“My dad was walking by my bedroom door when he heard me. He came into my room and asked me what the problem was. He really already knew, but he was trying to let me vent my frustration. At first, I beat around the bush until all of a sudden I started bawling again.”

“What made you start to bawl again?”

“I apologized for being a weakling, and not being cool like other kids. That was when he started crying and apologized to me for not being there to protect me. He told me how proud he was of me for the kind of person that I’m, and said that I’m the son he always hoped I would be. After that, we both started bawling like babies.”

“Then what happened?”

“It was awful! My mom heard all of the bawling and walked in the room to see what the problem was. My dad managed to get his crying down to a whimper enough to explain the whole thing to my mom.”

“And?”

“Then she started crying! It was horrible! The three of us sat on my bed crying. It reminded me of three old ladies crying during a sappy movie. Tissues, noses blowing, and the whole nine yards. That lasted for a couple of minutes until all of a sudden; I looked down on my bed and saw this huge pile of used tissues.”

“Yeah.”

“I looked up at my parents and started laughing. I went from total tears to uncontrollable laughter. It was so bizarre!”

“And?”

“Then we all started laughing. My dad excused himself and said he was going to get something that might help. When he came back to the room, he had a book in his hand. It was *The Max Broadwater Experience*. He told me about a baseball player who had some similar experiences.”

“Similar Experiences?”

“Well, Yeah, kind of. I mean, I haven’t been left out or picked on for my skin color, but I sure do know what it’s like to be treated different for what I look like.”

“Is it a pretty good book?”

“Yeah, it’s great. It really helped me cope with the whole situation, until you came to my rescue.”

“What did your dad do after all of that?”

“He started showing up at school unexpectedly to check in with Mr. Titus. Mr. Titus tries hard to watch out for me, but those guys are sneaky. They know he can’t always watch out for me, so they just wait for the opportunity to get me.”

“As long as we stick together, we shouldn’t have anymore problems,” said Ricky.

“Ricky, I really appreciate how you stick up for me.”

“That’s what friends are for, Jordi. Why do you want this book?”

“It has a part that really bugs me. Some guys wouldn’t let Max play ball, just because he’s black,” said Jordi as he handed the book to Ricky.

CHAPTER 15

THE MAX BROADWATER EXPERIENCE

The Max Broadwater Experience is an award-winning book about a young black kid from the inner city of Chicago in the 1940's. The book is written in an autobiographical format telling Max's experiences and confusion in searching for answers about why he was treated differently solely because he was black. Max set out on his own adventure to discover why. At the age of 13, Max packed his pillowcase with his "special" belongings and began his journey.

The part of the book that really bugged Jordi was when Max left the city and ended up at a ball field where a bunch of white kids were playing baseball. Max's jaw hit the ground when he saw the playing field. It was five times larger than the field he played on and there were far fewer players as well. This playing field even had grass!

Max's favorite activity was baseball. Even though he was a black kid standing next to an all white playing field, Max wandered over and asked if he could play. The white kids said, "No."

Max asked, "Why not?"

The kids replied, "Colored people don't play ball here." Max told them that he did, but they refused to let him play anyway.

This part of the book really drove Jordi crazy. Maybe it was because Jordi had always been the recipient of unfair treatment from others, but he could never get over that part of the book. Jordi told Ricky why he wanted that book, and marked the page with the bookmark.

"I know why you want this book, but what are we supposed to do when we get there?" asked Ricky.

"I don't know. I guess we'll see when we get there."

"Make sure you visualize standing by third base," said Ricky.

"One, two, three."

The next thing they heard was, "Hey, batta batta batta saaaawing batta," being shouted. The boys opened their eyes, and yet again they were in another book.

"Come on, Mick, you can do betta dan nat!" shouted another kid on the field.

Jordi looked around and could not believe his eyes when he saw none other than Max Broadwater sitting down and watching the pick-up game.

"There he is," said Jordi.

"How do you know that's him?" asked Ricky.

"Well, first off, we're in his biography. And secondly, he's the only black kid on the field."

"Oh, yeah, I just don't notice that kind of stuff. People are people, ya know?" said Ricky.

Jordi quickly walked over to where Max was sitting and tried to strike up a conversation. "How's it going?" asked Jordi.

"Not bad, but it would be betta if I could play some," said Max.

"Why can't you play?" asked Ricky.

"Boy, are you color blind? They don't let colored people play here," said Max with a frustrated look on his face. "All I ever want to do is play ball. Is there anything else in the world?" he said in frustration.

Ricky answered, "I guess I am color blind. To me, you're just another guy on the field."

Max's whole head turned toward Ricky to see the person he was talking to when he asked, "Are you colored?"

"I don't know, I guess maybe I am. I've never thought about it. I'm a Mexican-American," Ricky answered.

"I'm Jordi, and this is Ricky,"

"I'm Max."

"How bad do you want to play?" asked Jordi.

"I want to play so bad that I can taste it! I really want to show 'em just how I can play. I've never had a chance to hit against anybody that can pitch as good as the big guy. I think I can give him a run for his money. I've been watching for a while. He's got a pattern to his pitches. It's almost like reading a book. The last pitch was a slow ball, so the next should be a fast ball right down the middle," said Max.

"Really?" asked Jordi.

"Yeah, watch," said Max as they watched the meteoric ball sail across home plate. "Bammm!" Yelled Max. "That's the perfect pitch for a homerun. It's really fast, but I know I could hit that one."

"Ya think so, do ya?" asked Jordi.

"I know so!" said Max.

"Let me see what I can do." Jordi told Max and Ricky that he, the white guy of the trio, would go talk to the other boys and see if he could work out a deal for Max to play.

"Hey, don't you go getting into no fight now. I mean, I can run fast and all, but a black kid runnin' through this area ain't gonna look so good. Do ya know what I mean?" said Max.

"Look at me," said Jordi. "Do I look like a guy who can go and pick a fight?"

"Boy, you do got a point there. You really need to eat some more groceries! You're skinny!" said Max, as he giggled.

"I'll be back in a minute," said Jordi. For as much of a weakling as Jordi was, the kid really had some guts at just the right time.

Jordi walked over and found the biggest white kid in the group and talked to him. Max and Ricky weren't sure what Jordi was saying, but the big kid he spoke with kept on about colored people not playing ball. Initially, Jordi gave the pitch about all of them just being kids and having fun. After a few minutes of that, he went straight to hard-line negotiations. After about five minutes, Jordi walked back over and asked Ricky, "Are you pretty good at baseball?"

"I went to the batting cage with my mom once," he answered with a questioning look. "Why?"

"Well, I kinda challenged them to a game," said Jordi while biting his lip.

"So, what's the big deal about that?" asked Ricky.

"We really need to win!" said Jordi.

"Why?"

"Cause the only way they would let him play is if we bet them," said Jordi.

"What if we lose?" asked Ricky nervously.

"No big deal," said Jordi not volunteering any more information.

“What if we lose, Jordi?” asked Ricky.

“If we lose, we have to give them the hundred bucks that Max has in his bag, or we better run real far, real fast,” said Jordi. He was determined to right the wrong he had read about in the book.

“Jordi!”

“Come on Ricky, look on the bright side!” said Jordi.

“What bright side?” asked Ricky.

“You know that you guys are probably faster than me.”

“So?” said Ricky.

“Well, if we lose, it’s me that they’re gonna catch. Not you guys! You don’t have anything to worry about! It’s me that they’ll pound on!” laughed Jordi.

“How can you laugh right now?” asked Ricky.

“Because this is so cool! We’re actually in Max Broadwater’s book and were gonna play ball with him!” answered Jordi.

“What! A hundred dollars? Boy! I ain’t got no hundred dollars in my bag! Who carries a hundred dollars in their pocket?” A slightly unhumored Max yelled after overhearing the conversation.

“Shhhh! You know that, and I know that, but they don’t,” said a confident Jordi.

Ricky quietly waved Jordi over to speak with him privately. “Jordi, we don’t even know how he plays. I’ve never played much ball and the only time you’ve played ball is when you got plastered by them during dodge ball in elementary school,” said an angry Ricky.

“Ouch, Ricky, that really hurts. Have some faith. The guy is a future hall of famer for goodness sake.”

“Yeah, but, Jordi, we still don’t know if there’s a time limit on our adventures!”

“It’s going to be okay, Ricky. You know it’s wrong to not let him play just because he’s black. You’ve always done the right thing, even sticking up for me with Bo. Come on, Ricky, take a chance.”

“We don’t have a hundred dollars.”

“Don’t worry about that; we’re gonna win.”

“How do you know? Does the book say we win?”

“I don’t know that, but I know we’re gonna win because we’re right. I don’t know what it’s like to be black, but I know what it’s like for people to judge me by the way I look. I’ve lived it for the last few years. You can go now, but I’m staying to win!”

“Okay, I’m in, but if we run out of time and get stuck here, you better start running,” answered Ricky.

“Ricky, I sense hostility in your voice. Is something the matter? Maybe you should try the deep breathing exercises that Mrs. Sinton has us do before tests?” joked Jordi.

Ricky smiled and only said, “I’ll give you deep breathing exercises alright! We better kick their butts! Whatever you do, keep your eyes on the ball,” said Ricky.

“Hold that aggression until the game is over!” said Jordi.

“I’ll hold it longer if we get stuck in the 1940’s.”

Jordi walked back over to Max and said, “You wanted it, and now you’ve got it. It’s up to you, Max. Play the game of your life. We’ve got five innings, just us three against them.”

It was either the thrill of that field or the fear of losing. Whatever it was, Max played the game of his life. The team of three, consisting of the Mexican, the white and the black, beat the team of seven white kids. The final score was seven to two. Jordi and Ricky probably played the game of their lives also, but in reality, it was all Max. Max hit four homers over the fence and actually made a few triple plays on his own. Even though they were outnumbered, it sure helped only having three batters so Max could hit a lot more often and make up for some of Jordi's mistakes.

Thhmmmp! "Ouch! My shoulder! Man, that hurts!" yelled Jordi after getting hit by the ball in the third inning.

Ricky and Max quickly ran over to Jordi and said, "What are you doing?"

"What do you think I was doing? You guys told me to step in front of the ball so it wouldn't get by me. I did, and man does that hurt!" yelled Jordi back to them.

"Jordi, you're supposed to step in front of the ball, but stop it with the glove, not your chest. Catch the ball with your glove," yelled Ricky.

"Well now you tell me!" said Jordi rubbing his shoulder where the ball pummeled him.

Jordi managed to use his glove to stop and catch the ball for the rest of the game. He actually didn't play too bad, but Max was so fast that it seemed he could almost cover the infield and outfield at the same time.

After the game, the white kids came over and shook Max's hand. The biggest of the other kids was named Jackson Dean. Jackson even apologized for not letting Max play earlier.

Jackson told Max, "I'm sorry buddy. You play ball better than all of us! Shoot, you should be giving us lessons! My name is Jackson Dean."

"I'm Max. You've got a mean fastball!"

"I've never seen ball played like that before. That was really big league playin' out there. People might tell you that someday you ought to play in the colored leagues, but no, you ought to play in the majors. You need to be out there with Babe Ruth and all of them boys. Heck, you could probably give them lessons, too!"

"Thanks, but I don't think I'll ever make it that far."

"Do you ever think about playing in the big leagues?" asked Jackson.

"Not really."

"Why not?" asked Jackson.

"How should I expect to play in the big leagues when you guys won't even let me play on this field because of my color?" said a frustrated Max.

"This field was made for people with your kind of talent. Max, I was wrong and I'm sorry about all that stuff I said earlier. Can we put that past us?"

"Are you sorry because you know I play well or sorry because you know that I'm not any different than you?"

"I'm sorry for both, Max. But mostly because I judged you before I even knew you. My mom always says to not judge a book by its cover."

"Yeah, my mother always tells me to be patient with ignorance," said Max as he and Jackson stood staring at each other with blank faces. Ricky and Jordi stood silent and waited for some sort of confrontation to begin. After about a ten second stare which seemed like forever Jackson's face broke into a humbled smile.

"I had that coming to me. Your mom is right," said Jackson.

"So is yours," answered Max

"I guess moms are moms, huh?" laughed Jackson.

"Yeah!"

"There aren't too many people who would say that to me. You're pretty gutsy," said Jackson.

"I can see why they wouldn't. You're a pretty big guy, but those bruises heal fast. The other kind doesn't," answered Max.

"What other kind?" asked Jackson.

"The kind that go along with people telling me what I can and can't do because of my color."

"I can't take back the things I said, but I hope you'll take my word that I'm sorry."

"That's alright. Thanks for letting me play, even though it took little man making the bet with you," said Max.

"Do you have any friends that play as well as you?" asked Jackson.

"Maybe not as good as me, but they like to play."

"Bring them next time so we can fill all of the positions for a real pick-up game."

"What about colored people playing ball out here? I don't want anybody giving me trouble!" asked Max, referring to segregation where white and black people had separate facilities.

"Don't worry about that. I'm usually the biggest guy out here, so if anybody gives you trouble, they'll deal with me."

"Why do you want to help me now?" said a suspicious Max.

"Kind of for selfish reasons, because I've really never seen anyone play ball like that before."

"You really think I'm that good?"

"Max, I know you are! You were playing like a big leaguer. How old are you?"

"Thirteen, well I guess I'll be fourteen next month."

"I'm fifteen," said Jackson.

"What does my age have to do with it?" asked Max.

"People don't just hit homeruns like that, let alone thirteen year olds. I mean, they were all over the fence and this isn't a small field. Just think of how hard you'll hit when you're even older and stronger! I've never seen anybody do a one-man triple play, and you did it several times."

"Yeah, I was kind of surprised how well I played, but I really wanted to prove something to you!"

"Whether you were trying to prove something or not, you've got the talent. You're incredibly fast; you have a powerful swing and a keen eye for the ball."

"Thanks, but what are your selfish reasons?" asked Max.

"I want you to teach me what you know. I've never told anybody before, but my dream is to someday play in the big leagues. It may be crazy, but I really want to give it my best shot. I need your help to get me there. You already have the skills to play in the big league, I don't. You've got no reason to want to help me after how I was earlier, but if you'd give me a second chance I'd appreciate it."

"That's not a crazy dream; you pitch better than anybody I've ever seen."

“You really think so? I think I’m pretty good, but big league pitching is a whole different thing.”

“Yeah, it’s different, but just think how powerful your pitch will be when you’re older and stronger! Those batters aren’t even going to see the ball coming!”

“How about if we help each other get to the big leagues?” asked Jackson.

“Sounds good, but how do we do that?”

“Maybe we can train together and push each other. If we push each other hard, we might better our chances for the big league?”

“You might make it to the big leagues, but I don’t think they’ll let me play, even if I am good enough.”

“Trust me Max, if they see you play the way I saw you play today, they won’t have a choice. People want to see a good ball game, so let’s help each other so we can give it to them someday.”

“Alright Jax, you’ve got a deal!”

“Jax! Nobody’s ever called me that. I like the sound of it. The Max and Jax team, or should I say the Jax and Max team?”

“You can say it however you want, as long as they say it in the big leagues someday!” said Max.

With that, Ricky and Jordi told their new friends they needed to go and began to walk away when they heard, “Hey, little man,” Jordi quickly turned around to see Max waving and yelling, “thanks a lot!”

“No, thank you! See you in the big leagues!” Yelled Jordi. That was just about enough to carry Jordi through any bully session for the rest of his life.

“Hey, Jackson!” Jordi yelled.

“Yeah?” answered Jackson.

“Don’t forget that it’s not what’s here that’s important, it’s here,” said Jordi pointing to his skin and then his heart while smiling. “It’s a person’s heart and character, not their color.”

“I’ll never forget it little man! What about the money?” said Jackson, who was now talking with Max like an old friend.

“I’ll get it from you later!” answered Jordi.

“Thanks!” yelled Jackson.

Jordi and Ricky walked far enough away to be out of view. They took hold of the book and quickly went home.

The training that Max and Jax did together sure paid off in the end. They’re friendship grew to be inseparable as they honed their skills in baseball. Each was so competitive, that they forced the other to work harder than they would have, had they not been the Max and Jax team.

Max Broadwater wasn’t the first black person to play in the big leagues, but he sure did light up the scoreboard when he did. Jackson Dean also went on to play for the Yankees for 15 seasons and actually met up with Max at a major league game in 1956. Max again led his team to a victory with a last pitch grand slam. After the game, Jackson Dean was the first person to shake Max’s hand as he rounded home plate. A reporter overheard him saying, “I’m 0 for two with you, Max. You’re going to have to give me some better lessons.” That quote made all the headlines the next day.

Max never saw his two mysterious teammates again, but he later credited the scrawny one with teaching him how to handle pressure in life and on the field. It never sank in with Jordi until after he and Ricky returned from that adventure.

“Ricky, I think we’re the strangers that Max talks about in his book. I never noticed it before, but look here. He wrote about a childhood pick-up game that he believes was a pivotal point in his life. Could that be us?”

Ricky’s only answer was, “Yeah, is that cool or what?”

“Yeah, it’s cool, but is it kind of like playing with fire? What if we screw history up or something?”

“How could we screw up history? Isn’t it already set?” asked Ricky.

“Kind of, but with something like the feather, who knows?” answered Jordi.

With an experience like that, both boys just sat down on the floor and stared at the wall. Without any idea of the time that had passed, they both sat and thought about the experience of a lifetime.

“Hey, Jordi.”

“Huh?”

“You got a lotta guts! You were right about helping Max.”

“Thanks for backing me up, Ricky. It was our only choice.”

CHAPTER 16

LATE FOR SCHOOL

When they finally regained their senses, they looked at the clock and realized they were late for school. Even so, not much seemed to matter after their ball playing experience. They tried to walk quickly to school, but their legs wouldn't carry them fast enough. They were exhausted both mentally and physically from the ball game.

On the way to school, they pondered the powers of the bookmark. Was there a limit to what they could do with it? Where it could take them? How long they could visit? How many visits they could make? How many people could they take? Was there danger lurking if more people knew the secret? They agreed to meet with Redhorse again to get their questions answered.

Approaching the school they saw the silhouettes of the SCMB standing behind the school and smoking. The SCMB were far enough away from the school to avoid being caught by the faculty, yet close enough that Jordi and Ricky couldn't avoid them. Jordi and Ricky tried to walk a wide path around the thugs, but as they got closer, Bo and the boys stayed in front of their path.

Finally within speaking distance, Jordi and Ricky heard the chant.

"S--I--S--S--Y."

"YOU AIN'T GOT NO ALIBI."

Just as they were in the middle of the chant, Jordi interrupted and said, "Wow, Bo, you guys can use multi-syllable words and spell. Been reading the labels on your cigarette packs, huh, Bo? You're really hooked on Phonics!"

At first, Bo didn't quite know how to respond. He had never heard such disrespect from the school weakling. After staring with the "duh look" on his face for a minute, he had his own comeback:

"Nice to see that the Samsonite tattoo on your forehead's gone away. Ouch, that musta been pretty embarrassing to wear for a week!" laughed Bo.

"Yeah, Bo, it was, but not as embarrassing as the supposed school tough guy yelling out to everybody that he wears pink dresses and plays with Barbie dolls," said Jordi.

Ricky just stood and watched, in awe of Jordi the whole time. He was ready to step in at any minute. Ricky knew that if it were a battle of wits, Bo was completely unarmed against Jordi. Ricky was also impressed with Jordi's comebacks. The whole Max Broadwater experience must have really fired him up.

"I never said I play with Barbie dolls," assured Bo.

"So you wear pink dresses do you?" said Jordi, when he knew he had set Bo himself up pretty well for that one.

Zach and Matt, Bo's buddies, weren't the brightest bulbs in the lamp either. They both just stood with their mouths open in shock of the weakling who was pounding on their friend with his smart mouth.

Ricky just busted out laughing and started to pull Jordi's arm to lead him back to school. "Come on, we're already late."

As Ricky grabbed Jordi, Bo lunged toward him and said, "We're not through yet, momma's boy. You got lucky when that old man showed up yesterday. If he hadn't helped you, you would have been in the dumpster with your bag."

Ricky walked right up to Bo. They were so close that Ricky could smell the cigarettes on Bo's breath. For about ten seconds they just stood eye-to-eye. Finally, Bo said, "What?"

Ricky answered, "Two things, Bo. First, you need to brush your teeth because your breath really stinks. And second, you and these clowns don't have the guts to try it. I don't want to fight you, but if you push me too hard or try to hurt Jordi, you'll run home crying, just like you did before. Don't push me. It's much easier to be friends than enemies, but you don't want that. There will be a time when you need real friends and these two clowns won't be there for you. Mark my words."

Yet again, Bo wasn't quite sure what to say, so he just stared back at Ricky and said, "You're going to be in the dumpster, boy. You mark my words. You messed with the Santa Cruz Mountain Boys."

Ricky slowly stepped back and said, "You don't know the first thing about the real Santa Cruz Mountain Boys! Let's go Jordi. We're late for class."

Though Ricky wasn't afraid of them, he never took his eyes off the SCMB until they had turned the corner of the school.

CHAPTER 17

REDHORSE AND THE BOOKMARK

First period was almost over, so the boys decided to try and find Redhorse right away. They hoped to get Redhorse to answer some of their questions. It took them 10 minutes to get to him, while they avoided getting caught by faculty for being out of class.

They again found Redhorse in the boiler room. Before they could speak a word, he said, "I've been expecting you my friend. How is your adventure?"

Ricky was so full of questions that he didn't even know where to begin. "I thought you were pulling my leg or something, but it really works! Can I, or we, go anywhere? Who can I take?"

Redhorse paused before answering. He then explained, "It can take you anywhere that you need a bookmark. But be careful. The feather holds great powers that I don't even know about. You can take anyone with you, but be selective, because foolish hearts should not use this power. Great danger waits for those with foolish hearts and those who accompany them.

"My friend, you are now the carrier of the power. It is very difficult being the carrier. Now it is a bookmark, but that, too, may change in the future as it has changed in the past. You will know when the adventure must end or change. And you will then learn who the next carrier shall be. As I told you yesterday, I waited many years to deliver this to you. You will know."

"Thanks for helping us, Redhorse," said Ricky.

"Thank you, my friend. Remain a warrior for peace," said Redhorse.

After the conversation, Jordi and Ricky walked out more confused than when they had gone in.

The boys agreed to try to put it all out of their heads until after school. They promised to meet right afterward and hurry home so they could adventure some more.

As they parted company and headed for class, Jordi shouted to Ricky, "Don't let it out of your sight."

"Don't worry," said Ricky, "I won't."

CHAPTER 18

THE CHALLENGE

Staying focused on their schoolwork was extremely difficult for them. Neither boy could concentrate nor could they keep from fidgeting. The day was pretty uneventful except for lunch period, when Ricky freaked out as an unwitting sixth grader picked up his bag by mistake. The poor kid didn't know what to say when Ricky all but tackled him after figuring out who had the bag with the bookmark. After realizing his mistake, the younger kid apologized and went on his way.

Ricky needed to chill after the lunchroom incident. He went outside and sat down. He decided not to risk losing the bookmark again and wore his backpack all day. Even in gym class, he lugged the pack while making his laps around the track. He even wore his backpack in class and caught a lot of grief for looking so nerdy. Jordi managed to get a laugh in at Ricky during history class.

Nerdy or not, he still had the bookmark at the end of the day when he met Jordi by the library. "You still got it?" asked Jordi.

"Yeah, but I'm not going to bring it to school again. I've been freaking out all day trying not to lose it."

"Yeah, you did look pretty dorky wearing the bag in class."

"Yeah, yeah, at least I still have it though. Let's get going now," said Ricky.

"Have you thought about what our next adventure will be?" asked Jordi.

"Not really. I've been so worried about not losing this, I haven't had a chance to plan anything," answered Ricky.

As the two adventurers left the building headed for Jordi's home library, Bo and the boys intercepted them.

"Well, well, well. Afternoon ladies," said Bo looking directly at Ricky.

"Not now, Bo. We've got more important things to do than waste time with you," said Jordi.

"Gotta hurry home to put on your make up? Have a soap opera crisis?"

"No, you goon! We're going to travel through time!" answered Jordi, as Ricky grew irritated.

"Jordi, be quiet! Just let it go!"

"Oh my, they're having a lover's spat," said Bo. After this, Cardenez, you're gonna wish you had a waterproof briefcase like Jordan," said Bo.

"You're insignificant Bo, and that's what bothers you," said Ricky.

"Shut up Cardenez! Your bag is about to be insignificant," said Bo who seemed affected by Ricky's comment.

"Bo, if you touch my bag," said Ricky.

"What are you and your little sister gonna do about it? Travel through time and make it not happen," laughed Zach.

"If you touch his bag, I'll throw all three of you in the dumpster!" yelled Jordi.

This was so unlike Jordi that all four of the other boys, including Ricky, turned their heads in shock. They all four said, "What?" at the same time.

"Yeah, he's got something in his bag that would make you guys run home screaming like little babies!" said Jordi.

"Don't let him push your buttons, Jordi."

“What you got there, your stamp collection?” said Bo.

“He’s got a bookmark that will blow your minds,” said Jordi.

“Be quiet, Jordi. You’re gonna blow it! We don’t have to prove anything to them! Let’s go,” said Ricky as he turned to walk away.

“Oh my word. Guys, call 9-1-1. Cardenez has a bookmark. Quick, run and hide.”

“You’re an idiot, Bo. He’s got a living bookmark,” said Jordi, challenging Bo.

“Jordi! He’s trying to push our buttons,” said Ricky.

“Oh, boy, a living bookmark,” mocked Bo.

“None of you pansies have the guts to see what this bookmark can do! You can stand there acting stupid or you can show that you have some guts. What’s it going to be?” said Jordi.

“Nobody’s going anywhere! Remember what Redhorse told us,” said Ricky, frustrated with Jordi.

“So, let’s see the living bookmark. If there really is one. Maybe we won’t trash your bag after all, Cardenez,” said Bo.

“No, Bo, you don’t deserve to see it. Redhorse told us that people like you can cause danger. He said that foolish hearts shouldn’t adventure.”

“Cardenez, just like you said to me this morning, you don’t have the guts, but what would I expect from a momma’s boy?” said Bo who found just the right button to push with Ricky.

“Come on, Ricky, show ‘em,” said Jordi.

Ricky knew what he should and shouldn’t do. (Sometimes in life, people make the mistake of letting others use their emotions to make them do things they wouldn’t normally do.) For Ricky, this was one of those times. His frustration had grown too great for him to back down to Bo this time. He knew the decision he should make, but he took the challenge instead.

“Okay,” answered Ricky who made every effort to hold in the rage that stirred inside him.

“We’re doin it?” asked Jordi.

“Yep. Let’s see how these tough guys handle it?”

“Hand it over. We want to take a look at it,” said Bo.

“Okay, You guys can see how it works, but you better not touch it, or else,” said Ricky.

Before Ricky pulled the bookmark out of his bag, he set up some ground rules so everybody knew what to do.

“Only one of you can go this time. You guys decide who will go. I don’t care who it is. And we do it in the library so nobody does anything funny. Maybe somebody else can go next time. Who’s going?” said Ricky.

“How come only one of us can go?” asked Bo.

“Cause I don’t trust you guys. If all of us go, what’s to say you won’t steal the feather, ditch us, and leave us in the book?”

Bo smiled and said; “now why would we do that?”

“Why do you guys do anything you do?” asked Jordi.

“Who’s it going to be?”

Bo quickly said, “Zach is going first. Okay with you, Zach?”

Zach giggled and said, "Oooh, it's so spooky! I don't know if I can handle it."

Jordi walked over to Zach, got in his face, stared, and said, "You're going to crack like an egg, Zach. You're gonna freak out. I can see it in your eyes."

"Why would I freak out about some stupid bird feather? Nothin's gonna happen."

"Keep telling yourself that tough guy!"

Zach suddenly had a nervous twitch and began fidgeting. Though he was afraid, he couldn't let the school weakling get the best of him. He said, "Bring it on!"

"Okay, just like Ricky did for me, we're going to start you off nice and easy. What's your favorite children's story?" Jordi said with an eager smile.

"Why?" said Zach.

"Because that's where we're going, tough guy." Jordi was getting even cockier as he looked at Zach.

Zach tried to maintain a cool, calm, unafraid look and said, "*Jack and the Beanstalk*."

Jordi checked the table of contents in the children's story book they had used earlier in the morning and said, "I just happen to have it right here. What is your favorite part of the story?"

Zach quickly said, "Where Jack is running for his life from the giant."

Jordi looked over at Bo, Zach, and Matt and said, "Oh yeah, you're going to crack like an egg alright. I hope you find a good therapist."

Before going in, Ricky looked at Bo, and said, "Bo, you and I don't like each other, but no funny business while we're gone, all right? If you really like Zach, you won't do anything foolish, because I'm not sure what you'll see while we're gone."

That man-to-man comment must have gotten to Bo because he quickly said, "I'm not going to do anything but laugh when your bluff is called and nothing happens."

Jordi again looked and smiled at Zach and said, "Are you sure you're ready there, tough guy?"

Zach was starting to get annoyed with Jordi and quickly said, "When this thing doesn't work, I'm going to pound you into the ground and Bo's going to take care of Cardenez."

"Don't you worry, Zach. It's gonna work. I just hope you brought a change of underwear?"

"Why?" asked Zach.

"Cause you're gonna need them when you get back. I'll betcha ten bucks that you're not acting so tough when this is over!" laughed Jordi.

"I'll bet you ten bucks, you're gonna be runnin in about thirty seconds."

"It's a bet," said Jordi.

"Okay, when I put the bookmark on the page and close this, that's when we shut our eyes and visualize the scene while holding the book. On three, ready?" asked Ricky.

"One, two, three...."

"FEE, FI, FO, FUM; I SMELL THE BLOOD OF AN ENGLISHMAN," was all they heard as they opened their eyes to see that they were in the story.

"Where's Zach?" asked Ricky as he looked around.

"He must have chickened out!" responded Jordi, as he and Ricky were quickly taken aback at the bloodcurdling scream from somewhere nearby

"He must have visualized something different. I should have known he wouldn't

do what we told him,” said Ricky.

“I bet he wishes he had! Who’s the wuss now?” said Jordi with a smile on his face. It was the smile of years of frustration and bullying melting away.

As they looked around, they realized they were inside yet another huge castle.

The doorway where they knelt looked 30 feet high. The screams were coming from somewhere nearby where, by the sound of it, the giant lurked. Ricky told Jordi to stay put while he ran over and checked out the next room. He was hoping that Zach was just being a “wuss”. Ricky didn’t know what he would do if the giant already had Zach in his grip. If the giant didn’t already have him, it was just a matter of time before he did, as Zach was screaming as loud as a soprano singer in a church choir!

As Ricky got to the doorway, he was knocked over by Jack, who just happened to be running away with the golden egg that everybody reads about. CRASH! BAMM! Was felt and heard as Jack and Ricky collided with each other. They hit the floor, looked at each other, and at the same time said, “Who are you?”

“Hi, I’m Ricky. You must be Jack?”

“Yeah, how’d you know that?”

“It’s a long story and we don’t have time to talk about it.”

After the introductions, Jack’s attention quickly focused on the golden egg. It just so happened to be rolling right over to Jordi, who excitedly said, “Dude, I have the golden egg in my hand!”

Ricky yelled, “Jordi, you’ve got the book. Go back and get Bo and bring him back to help.”

“Will it work, Ricky?” asked a confused Jordi.

“I don’t know, but if it doesn’t, Zach is going to be a mid-day snack for the giant!”

“Hey, that’s my egg. Give it back!” yelled Jack.

“We’ll give you back the egg after you help us get our friend back,” said Ricky.

“Jordi, go now, while you have the chance.”

“What about you, Ricky? Just leave Zach,” yelled Jordi.

“We can’t leave him. We have to help. We brought him here,” said Ricky, who was a true friend when it mattered, even if the person he was helping had caused him so much grief.

“Yeah, we brought him here, but he’s a big boy! Why not leave him?” urged Jordi.

“I can’t because my dad didn’t! That’s why,” said Ricky.

“What do you mean your dad didn’t? Are you crazy?” asked a confused Jordi.

“Just go while you have the chance!” said Ricky, who felt like smacking Jordi for thinking of leaving someone in peril, especially after *The Max Broadwater Experience*.

In an instant, with the egg in hand, Jordi was out and back in the library. When he got there, he dropped the egg on the table and saw two faces that were in complete disbelief.

Before Jordi could even utter a word, Matt bolted out of the library screaming, “Mommy!”

“Wha, wha, wha, wha, where’d they go? I mean, I was standing here and you guys just disappeared, and now you’re back and they’re not. What’s that?” said Bo, pointing to the golden egg.

"This is the golden egg Jack tried to steal from the giant. We're holding it hostage so Jack will help us. We don't have time to talk. The guys are in big trouble. Zach freaked out and now the giant has him. He didn't follow Ricky's directions and landed next to the giant and screamed like a little school girl," said Jordi.

"This can't be happening," said Bo.

"It is happening, tough guy. We need your help. Are you in or out? You act tough, now put up or shut up! They won't make it out if you and I don't help them. Are you going?" said Jordi in a tone that he had never experienced before.

"I'm in. Let's go!" answered Bo as he clenched the book.

Almost as quick as Bo took hold of the book, they were in and heard Zach's desperate screams. "Mom, Dad, help. Ricky, help!"

Unaware of Ricky's location or even if he knew they were back, Bo and Jordi heard Ricky yell back. "It's going to be okay, Zach. I'll get you out. Hang on!"

"Hurry!" shouted Zach.

Jordi quickly yelled back, "Ricky, we're back! Bo's with me. Are you okay?"

"Yeah, Jack showed me a secret hiding place. We ran in here to hide and come up with a plan. I was going to give you another minute and then go it alone. Thanks for coming, Bo!" said Ricky.

"Anytime. Thanks for helping my friend!" answered Bo, who wasn't used to these kinds of words from someone who was supposed to be his worst enemy.

"Whether we like it or not, we're going to have to work together as a team in order for all of us to make it out of here," yelled Ricky to Jordi and Bo.

"Ya got any clever ideas now, Ricky? Or maybe a plan?" asked Jordi.

"Not really. The guy is so huge! Did you bring the egg back with you?" yelled Ricky.

"Yeah, we have it here," said Jordi.

"Thank goodness!" said Jack. "My mom will kill me if she finds out that I spent her hard-earned money on those beans and didn't make it home with anything."

Bo was still in total confusion and whispered to himself, "I can't believe this is really happening. I thought you guys were lying about all of this."

"Hey, Jordi, you still have the book, right?" asked Ricky.

"Yeah!" answered Jordi.

"Don't let it leave your hands, no matter what!" yelled Ricky, who was thinking Bo might take it and ditch them.

"I'll guard it with my life!"

"Have you guys ever heard the story of David-and-Goliath?" asked Ricky.

"Yeah?" answered the boys with questioning looks on their faces.

"Well, the only thing I can come up with is putting that egg to good use by pulling a little David and Goliath action," said Ricky.

"You've gotta be kidding!" whispered Bo.

"I don't have a slingshot, but I'm hoping that this morning's baseball practice warmed me up. Maybe those tips that Max Broadwater gave me will pay off. When I give you guys the signal, toss the egg to me. I'm going to throw it at the giant's head and hopefully clobber him good enough to make him to drop Zach. Ya hear that, Zach?" yelled Ricky.

"Yeah, just hurry!" said Zach, who was completely trapped in the palm of the

giant's hand.

"If this works, Zach, you run straight to Jordi. Bo and I will follow. Jordi, have the book ready. You and Bo should already be holding the book when Zach and I get there. Visualize the library. Can you run, Zach?"

"You get me out of his hand, and I'll get there," said Zach.

"Ready? One, two, three, GO!" screamed Ricky. He quickly ran right in front of the giant, and caught the egg that Bo threw to him, while Jordi held the book ready for take off.

Ricky threw the heavy golden egg straight at the giant's head. A loud thud was heard by all as Ricky made a good connection just above the giant's nose. The stunned giant did drop Zach, but he fell on his ankle and couldn't run away. Ricky saw Zach's problem and stayed in front of the giant, now focusing his anger on Ricky.

Ricky, in a true hero's moment, said, "You guys get Zach while I have him distracted. I'll catch up." Bo quickly jumped forward and helped Zach limp back to Jordi, who was holding the book. Ricky tried running a wavy pattern to elude the giant.

Just as Jordi yelled, "Come on, Ricky!" he saw the giant grab Ricky by the leg and hold him upside down in the air laughing. Even upside down, Ricky yelled, "Get out while you can! I'll try to figure something out."

Jordi didn't know what to do. He quickly learned that the decision had been made for him, as he was suddenly back in the library. Zach was crying even more and took off running with Bo not too far behind him.

"Just as I expected, Bo," yelled Jordi. "He just saved your friend's life, and you leave him high and dry. Who's the sissy now?"

Something that Jordi said triggered Bo to stop, turn around, and come back. Maybe it was the story his mom had told him about a brave stranger from a few years earlier.

"Wow, you're going?" said Jordi.

"Let's go kick some giant butt!" said Bo.

"Let's roll!" said Jordi.

CHAPTER 19

TEAMWORK

In a flash, they were back in. Jordi yelled, “Hey Ricky, we’re here!”

“You’re back! Who’s with you?” asked Ricky.

“Just Bo and I, Ricky, but we’re going to get you out. We have a plan.”

“Good, cause this dude’s hungry, and I think I’m the main course. Not to rush you guys, but I think I’m in the kitchen, and there’s a barrel of water is boiling. Feel free to hurry,” responded Ricky.

“What plan?” questioned Bo to Jordi.

Jordi shrugged his shoulders and answered, “The one we better come up with fast.”

Bo thought to him self for a moment, grinned and said, “Okay, I got it.” He pulled a pack of cigarettes out of his pocket. He lit up a couple as Jordi stared at him with disdain.

“You know, Bo, this really ain’t the time to take a smoke break,” said Jordi.

“Take it easy Jordan; this is a part of my plan.” Bo yelled, “Hey, Cardenez! Is he wearing socks and shoes?”

“Yeah, and his feet stink, too!” yelled Ricky, who looked up at the giant and said, “No offense.”

“Cardenez, I’m coming in, and I need you to make a lot of noise, okay?” yelled Bo, running into the kitchen. Jordan, you stay there with the book. I’ll get him. Just be ready!”

As Bo reached the kitchen, Ricky was making so much racket that the giant picked him up, held him up to his face and growled at him. Ricky distracted the giant, while Bo fiddled around at the base of the giant’s shoes, at his sock line. Ricky had a hard time seeing it, but noticed that Bo placed the lit cigarettes in the giant’s socks and whispered to himself, “Smoking’s a nasty habit, dude. You really oughta think about quitting. I just did.”

Bo yelled as he knelt down and hid behind the barrel, “Should only be a minute now, Cardenez. Be ready to run to the hallway. Get ready, Jordan!”

Sure enough, it was only about a minute before the giant set Ricky down and began fidgeting with his feet. Just a few more seconds and the fidgeting transformed into what appeared to be bad dancing. Ricky looked down at the giant’s feet and noticed his socks were smoldering.

“Get ready, Cardenez. When I yell, take off,” said Bo.

The giant’s socks went up in flames, and his dancing changed to frantic screaming and jumping.

“NOW!” yelled Bo, waving for Ricky to head out. Bo followed close behind.

For a couple of seconds, the giant was distracted enough for them to reach Jordi and clutch the book. Before clenching the book, Ricky yelled, “See ya, Jack,” Who now had the goose in hand instead of the egg.

Jack yelled, “See ya. Keep the egg, giant. I’ll just take this big chicken instead.”

In yet another instant, the three amigos were back in the library looking at each other in total disbelief. Without saying a word, they sat down and stared at the book resting in Ricky’s hands.

The deafening silence was interrupted as Ricky picked up the book and gazed at it. He turned his head to Bo and said, "I guess I never thought I'd be glad that you smoke, Bo."

"Well, I kind of just quit. What is this all about?"

"What was what about?"

"The bookmark stuff. Where did you get it?"

"Redhorse gave it to me."

"Who's Redhorse?"

"He's the old man that helped me yesterday when you threw my bag in the dumpster."

"Oh yeah, well uh, sorry about the bag thing. That won't happen again."

"No problem," said Ricky.

"Thanks. Why did he give it to you? I mean, this kind of thing doesn't really happen in real life," asked Bo.

"I don't know why he gave it to me. I thought he was just giving me the bookmark because he felt sorry for me with the bullying stuff. He told me that he saw you guys messing with me yesterday morning also. I didn't think it would actually work!"

"It's just odd that a total stranger would give you something like this," said Bo.

"I know. I'm really wondering what he meant when he told me that I'm now some kind of carrier."

"What a day, huh guys?" asked Jordi.

"That was a pretty good plan you came up with to use the cigarettes, Bo. Why did you come back? I figured you were going to ditch me," asked Ricky.

Jordi interrupted, "I called him a sissy."

Bo replied, "It wasn't that, Jordan. It was when you said Cardenez had all but died to rescue Zach. It reminded me of something my mom told me a few years ago."

"What was that?" asked an inquisitive Jordi.

"She told me the story of the Redwood Valley Flood and how somebody had rescued her."

"My dad was at the Redwood Valley Flood," said Ricky not volunteering any more information.

"He was? You never told me that," said Jordi.

"I don't like to talk about it."

"What was he doing there?" said Jordi.

"That's what I don't like to talk about," said Ricky not wanting to relive the event that prevented him from ever knowing his father.

"Oh, sorry. So what's this stuff about your mom, Bo?" asked Jordi.

"Well, she told me she was on her way home from a doctor's appointment, 'cause she was pregnant, and was driving down Orchard Road. Her car was swept into the creek by a wall of water when..." Bo was suddenly interrupted, as Ricky continued the story:

"It hit a small tree that kept it from washing out until one of the Santa Cruz Mountain Boys showed up and delivered the baby," said Ricky. "Afterward, he strapped the baby and the mom into the rescue basket just in the nick of time, and then the car washed out. Yeah, that was my Dad," said a saddened Ricky. He hated to relive the moment that prevented him from ever knowing his father.

“Ricardo Cardenez was your dad?” spouted Bo.

“Yeah.”

“I knew your last name was Cardenez, but I never knew you were the other kid. Your dad has always been my hero. My mom said the Santa Cruz Mountain Boy who saved us had a pregnant wife. You’re the other boy!” said an astonished Bo. He was in even more shock now than he had been in after the adventure. “He’s the reason I’m alive today,” said Bo as several seconds passed without a word being said.

“Wow, talk about awkward pause in the conversation!” said Jordi.

“Man, Ricky, I’m so sorry!” That was the first time Bo had ever called him by his first name.

“Yep, that was my Dad. I’ve heard all kinds of stuff about him, but I never got to know him,” said Ricky.

Bo quickly said, “When I was a kid I used to hope and pray that I would someday get to meet that other boy and tell him how grateful I am for his father. I have always wanted the chance to do something nice for you, but I’ve been doing the total opposite. I’m so sorry.”

Bo reached into his pocket and pulled out his wallet. He took out a piece of paper and said, “See Ricky, I’ve carried the newspaper article about the flood in my wallet, ever since I was a kid. My mom gave it to me a long time ago.”

A solemn Ricky said, “That’s alright, Bo. At least we’re friends now, huh? Actually, you did save my life when you came back to help me.”

“I’m glad my dad did what he did. Not too many kids get to have a hero for a dad. I just wish I could have known him. My mom has told me everything about him, but I would love to see him for myself. I know it sounds corny, but I just want to do those father-son things that other people do.”

“Hey, Ricky, what about the bookmark and the newspaper article?” said Bo.

“What about it?”

“Would it work for an adventure trip or whatever we just did?”

“No, Redhorse said that only something that needed a bookmark could be used.”

“Oh,” said a disappointed Bo, “where do we go from here?”

“What do you mean?” asked Ricky.

“I feel like such a jerk!” said Bo.

“You should. You’ve been a big jerk for as long as we’ve known you!” said Jordi who finally had the chance to safely vent his frustration with Bo.

“You’re right. I know you guys have no reason to ever trust me or believe anything I say, but I really am sorry Ricky.”

“How about me?” quipped Jordi.

“Yes, Jordan I’m sorry to you also, but honestly I feel a lot worse about being a jerk to Ricky. I feel like I’ve been disrespectful to your dad.”

“Let’s try to put it all behind us. I feel exhausted. How about you guys?” asked Ricky.

“I don’t think I could sleep now if I tried. What are you guys going to do?” asked Bo

Jordi said, “I can sure sleep. I’m going home to take a nap. If adventuring didn’t take it out of me, the story of your dad sure did.”

“THAT’S IT! THE STORY OF MY DAD! THAT’S THE ANSWER! I CAN

USE THE STORY OF MY DAD. I HAVE TO GO HOME NOW!” yelled Ricky, who had an idea that might make his greatest wish come true.

“What are you talking about, Ricky?” asked Bo.

“Jordi, you said it, the story of my Dad. That’s it! My dad’s journal is the answer. He kept one all of his life.”

“I don’t get it, Ricky,” said Bo.

“I do! Redhorse said anything that needs a bookmark! Your dad’s journal has a bookmark doesn’t it?” said Jordi as he realized what was about to take place.

“I’ve got to get to my house, guys. Do you want a second chance Bo?” asked Ricky.

“Yeah!” Bo quickly answered.

“Help me now and we’ll put the past behind us. Right, Jordi?”

“You got it!” said Bo.

“I guess, but there’s a lot of past to put behind me,” answered Jordi.

“I understand Jordan. Give me the chance and I’ll prove myself to you!” pleaded Bo.

“Let’s start by you calling me Jordi. Calling me Jordan only re-kindles unpleasant memories.

“Thanks, Jordi!” smiled Bo as he reached his hand out to shake Jordi’s hand.

“Guys, are you up for one more adventure?” asked Ricky.

“Count me in!” said Jordi.

“Me too!” said Bo.

“Here’s what I’ve got in mind. I may not ever have a dad, but I might be able to at least use his journal to meet him.”

“Awesome!” yelled Jordi.

“Whatever you need me to do, just tell me!” said Bo.

The three boys though tired from the craziest day in their lives, hurried out of the school and ran all the way to Ricky’s house. They followed Ricky to his bedroom closet, where he kept his Dad’s most special belongings. One was his Dad’s life journal.

CHAPTER 20

THE JOURNAL

When they got to the closet, Ricky reached in and pulled out his dad's strong box, a small square lock box that boys used in the old days to hold some of their most prized belongings. Ricky pulled the box from the closet and sat it down on the bed.

He opened it and began to carefully sort through his Dad's stuff, looking for the journal.

"Cool!" yelled Jordi, noticing what looked like a huge tooth.

"Is that a shark's tooth?" said Bo.

"Yeah, my dad caught this when he went fishing off the Capitola Pier as a teenager. Here's a picture of him and the shark," said Ricky proudly.

"That sucker's as big as a car!" said Bo. "How did he reel it in?"

"My mom said it took three guys to pull it to shore."

Ricky sorted through what must have been the coolest guy stuff ever. It seemed to take forever because the other two boys couldn't help but slow him down when they saw something cool.

"Dude, is that a rattlesnake's rattle?" asked Jordi.

"Yeah, he found this one coiled up in our driveway when he got home from work late one night."

"How many rattles are there?" asked Bo, who had never in his life seen a real rattle, except on television.

"Fifteen. Mom said it was almost eight feet long. He kept the skin for a while, until she made him get rid of it. She said that it scared her every time she went out to the garage."

Still sorting through all of the "cool stuff," Ricky finally made it to the journal. "Here it is!" he said. "I've never really looked at it much, because it always brings me down. My mom told me that he made journal entries about the really important things that happened in his life."

"Like what?" asked Bo.

"I don't know. I guess like finding out mom was pregnant, finishing firefighting school, and joining the Santa Cruz Mountain Boys, and stuff like that."

The boys watched as Ricky opened it to the first page and saw his dad's most prized baseball cards, which he had kept in the journal nearly all his life.

"Holy cow, is that a Mickey Mantle card?" said Bo, who obviously was a baseball card fanatic by the goofy look on his face.

"Yeah, Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Ted Williams, and believe it or not, even Max Broadwater and Jackson Dean!"

"Dude, you have Max Broadwater's card?" said Jordi.

"Yeah, I didn't really know who Max Broadwater was 'til you told me. I forgot my dad even had it," said Ricky.

"Man, Ricky, all of these cards are worth thousands of dollars!" said Bo, seeming only to see the dollar signs and not the sentimental importance that Ricky had for his Dad's belongings.

"It doesn't really matter what they're worth, because I'm never getting rid of these. This stuff is all I have to get to know my dad. Aside from the stories my mom

tells me about him, this may be all I'll ever have," said Ricky, placing the cards back in the front cover and turning to the first page that was titled, "Bulees."

"You guys up for one more? I don't know what to expect. If you guys want out, I totally understand. When we open this adventure, we're messing with the future and the past all at once," said Ricky, determined to look his dad in the eyes -- something he had never done before.

"I'm in," said Jordi.

"Let's go for it," said the new and improved Bo Batura.

"Guys, I don't even know where to start," said Ricky.

"Well, seeing as we all have experience with the bully thing, maybe we should start there, on April 27, 1971, with the 'Bulees' entry. It looks like that one has something to do with bullies," said Bo, who was still somewhat ashamed of his own history as a bully.

"Before we go in, let's read a little so we know what to visualize," said Ricky, as he started to read aloud:

April 27, 1971

Bulees

Tuday started out rilly bad but wint ok at da end. Bulees were on playgrownd but all ends ok.

Mommy got dis jurnal to help me rite beder. I beg her aftr skool for it. Mi inglish iz not gude yet, but Mi nu balcard colekshun is gude.

There wasn't much on the page and the writing was difficult to understand. The boys took a couple of minutes and a couple of times reading the journal page, to finally make some sense of the entry. They weren't sure if it would work, but it was worth a try.

"What do we visualize?" asked Bo.

"The playground," answered Ricky.

"Yeah, but what playground?"

"Let's just visualize standing next to the monkey bars on a playground. If we all visualize the same thing, maybe the bookmark will take care of the rest."

As soon as the bookmark was placed in the book, they closed it and visualized the playground where seven-year-old Rico Cardenez was being harassed. The three boys looked at each other in awe as they realized they were actually looking at Ricky's dad as a child.

"What's wrong, kid, can't you talk right?"

"Yeah, you sound funny."

Ricky, Bo, and Jordi all looked over to see the little boy being harassed by a couple of others on the playground. Bo's natural instinct was to bully the bullies, but he decided to stay out of it and let Ricky do the work. Ricky walked straight over and

started speaking Spanish with the little boy. Fortunately, Ricky's mom taught him to read and speak Spanish at a very young age.

"Que pasa, amigo?" said Ricky. In English this means, "What's happening, buddy?"

The little seven-year-old Mexican boy looked up and smiled in surprise to see somebody who not only spoke his language, but also had the same skin color. Little Rico quickly answered in Spanish. He told Ricky that the kids were teasing him because he was having difficulty speaking and writing in English. Ricky asked which kids were picking on him. Rico pointed and the pair walked over to them.

When they reached the kids, Ricky said, "Hey guys, how's it going? My name is Ricky, what's yours?"

"Kevin."

"Tommy."

"Can you guys do me a favor?" asked Ricky.

"I don't know."

"Maybe."

"You see, my friend Rico here speaks Spanish and English. Do you guys speak two languages?"

"Nuh uh."

"Nope."

"You see, he speaks really great Spanish, but he's still learning English. His parents don't speak English very well, so he only gets to practice at school. He's pretty good at it, but I need him to get better because he's in charge of my baseball card collection. I need him to be able to make good trades for me. Do you wanna see the Babe Ruth and Max Broadwater cards? He can show you, but first you have to make me a promise that you'll help him with English so he'll be able to make good trades for me. Okay?"

"Babe Ruth!" said Kevin.

"Forget Babe Ruth! You have Max Broadwater?" said Tommy.

"Would you guys like for Rico to help you learn Spanish? He's really good at it. If he taught you guys Spanish, the three of you could talk and say things that other people wouldn't understand. You could be like top-secret spies. Pretty cool, huh?" said Ricky.

"Yeah!" said Tommy.

"Cool!" said Kevin. "Hey, Rico, will you teach us some Spanish?"

"Yeah, Rico, could you teach us to say things that the teacher won't even understand?" said Tommy.

"Si." said Rico laughing. "Dat's da firs lessun."

Ricky turned to young Rico and said, "I need you to hold on to my cards for a while okay? These cards are very special to me, so take good care of them."

Rico just smiled and said, "Okay," and "tank you."

"What is dat?" Rico asked, pointing to the journal.

"Oh, this is my journal. I write special things that happen to me in it. This is where I also keep my ball-card collection," said Ricky.

"I liik de jurnl, I ask my mudder tu git me won liik it," said Rico.

"I think that's a great idea. Mine helps me write better. Maybe someday you can let me see your journal."

“Okay.”

“My friends and I have to go now,” said Ricky.

“Tanks for help,” said Rico. His life had just changed because of the simple goodness of a stranger.

“Hey, what about deez,” asked Rico pointing to the ball cards.

“I said you could keep them. Just make good trades for me,” answered Ricky.

“I taught you were ownly joking. Tanks a lot! I won’t luse dem!” shouted Rico.

“Thank you!” answered Ricky.

The boys turned to walk away, and Ricky noticed Rico, Tommy, and Kevin staring with awe at the new ball card collection that many professional collectors would die for.

“Let’s go home, guys,” Ricky said with what looked like a tear in his eye and a smile on his face.

In an instant, they were back in Ricky’s bedroom. All three were speechless, motionless, and confused. Jordi laughed and spoke up, “Okay, Ricky, that’s about the freakiest thing I’ve ever seen in my life. You gave your dad the baseball cards that were his anyway from, like, 30 years ago. You showed him the journal that was his, but he didn’t have it yet. If you didn’t show him the journal, he wouldn’t have it, so you wouldn’t have it to give to him or even be able to meet him. Dude, no offense but that was just weird!”

Ricky wiped his eyes, looked over and said, “Guys, you haven’t seen half of what I have in mind. Now that I know it can work with the journal, I’ve got bigger and better plans for the next adventure.”

CHAPTER 21

LIFE BOOK

Though Ricky wanted to heed Redhorse's warnings, he still so desperately wanted a dad. After the first journal adventure, he decided he had better go on the next one alone, because he didn't know what would happen. This next adventure wasn't just going to be an adventure. Ricky wanted to make history, or at least change it.

"Hey, guys look in the book," said Ricky as he opened the book and pointed to where the cards had been. "The baseball cards are gone. Rico still has them. That means not only can we bring something out like the golden egg, but we can take something in and leave it," said Ricky.

The first journal adventure showed him how everything in life hinges on something else. Something as simple, yet freaky, as the journal conversation with little Rico showed Ricky how life is full of consequences.

Finally, he understood why some people described life as a book and our life experiences as the chapters. If a page is removed, the chapter isn't complete, and neither is the book. The missing page disrupts the entire story and can change its outcome. So if our lives really are like a book, will changing one experience re-write our entire life story? If so, then what would happen to the significant people and events in our lives? Could changing our life story jeopardize them as well? He knew it was selfish, but Ricky spent his entire life without the dad he longed for. Regardless of the outcome, he was willing to try.

The jeopardy involved in his next idea was that he was going to try inserting a new page in his dad's book of life. Many questions lingered in his mind.

"Okay, guys, I think I should go this next one alone, but I really need your help to get ready," said Ricky, who started to really freak out his friends.

"Ricky, you know I'm in, but should we slow down a little bit," said Jordi.

"I wish I could, but I have to do this while I have the chance. I don't know how long I'll be allowed to use this thing," answered Ricky pointing to the bookmark.

"Me, too, just do your best to make sure that I can still be born, okay?" said Bo, who was pretty clued in to the consequences of Ricky's actions.

Bo's comment alone was enough of a warning to make someone think twice about manipulating history. If Ricky went in and changed history at the wrong moment, would Bo's life story change?

"Bo, I'm going to need that article after all. You see, the problem back then was that technology probably wasn't as good as it is today. Your mom said the basket wouldn't hold all three of you. What if we get something that's available today and give it to him to use?" said Ricky.

"Take something to him?" asked Jordi.

"Yeah," answered Ricky.

"Like what?" said Bo who was tired and confused.

"I don't know. That's what I need you and Jordi to figure out. Do you think you guys can find out if there is something they use now that we or I can take in? I don't even know where we should start. Maybe someone at the firehouse could tell us. Find out if there is something they would do different these days. I mean, it would be crazy to try to take a new rescue basket in with me, but I'm willing to do anything" said Ricky.

“Why do you want the article, Ricky? How will that help anything?” asked Bo.

“It’s probably a long shot, but I’m going to glue it into one of the entry pages. If it’s a permanent part of the journal, then I should be able to go into the article about the flood.”

CHAPTER 22

THE FIREHOUSE

Considering the circumstances facing the three boys in the next step of the journey, they had to be willing try just about anything to figure out how to make it safe and successful. After talking and planning what they could, they came up with the idea to divide and conquer. They each had a separate research mission to accomplish for day four.

Perhaps the most challenging and important mission went to Bo, who said he would go down to the firehouse to get more information about the flood. Though his cover story was not entirely true, Bo soon learned that he could actually use the information for his California history class. He still had that overdue research report to complete, even though it was a few weeks late. Just last week, Mrs. Sinton reminded Bo that he had no chance of passing the class without completing the assignment.

Bo ambled into the firehouse very sheepishly. He was totally unsure about how to get the information, or even whom he needed to talk to. As he entered the firehouse, he heard somebody yell.

“What ya need there, partner?” asked a voice from inside.

Bo looked up and saw a man standing on top of one of the fire-trucks, cleaning.

“Uh, I’m doing a report for my history class and wanted to see if there was someone I could talk to about The Redwood Valley Flood. I’m writing about heroes and the flood. Is there someone I could talk to?” asked Bo.

“If you’re doing a report on the flood, that’s the man you need to talk to right over there. Captain O’Malley-- he was there. He’s one of the heroes you’re talking about. Hey, Captain! This kid needs some information about the flood. Ya got a minute?”

“Yeah,” said O’Malley.

“Hey, kid, he doesn’t talk about the flood much. He hasn’t gotten over it yet. I guess you never do, but him especially. Take it easy on him, okay kid?”

Unsure of what to say, Bo just said, “Yes sir.”

Bo hesitantly walked into the Captain’s office and was greeted with a handshake and, “Hey, kid, I’m Captain O’Malley, nice to meet you.”

“Hi, Mr., uh Captain O’Malley, my name is Bo Batura, and I’m doing research about the Redwood Valley flood.”

The Captain’s eyes glossed over as memories from that tragic day revisited his mind, “What do you want to know?”

“I’m doing a report on the flood and the heroes involved for my Cal-History class. The fireman on the truck said that you were one of the heroes at the flood. Can you tell me about it?” said Bo.

The mood quickly changed as the captain got a far away look in his eyes. It appeared that he was reliving each painful moment. O’Malley’s eyes became transfixed on the wall beside his desk. He pointed at a picture frame on the wall and said, “There it is, kid. That’s the day.”

Bo saw that it was the newspaper article about the flood.

The captain said, “I framed the article and hung it there to remind me that every new day is my gift from Rico. Yeah, Bo, I’ll tell you about it. I don’t talk about it much because we lost somebody great that day.”

“Picture this. It was a cold, dark, rainy day. The rain was heavier than I had ever seen in my life. To this day, I still haven’t seen rain like it. Our station as well as many others was called to the scene to support rescue operations for the wash out. We had hardly gotten out of our trucks, and we were pulling people from trees, cars, and houses. My partner, Ricardo Cardenez, had the day off. We all called him Rico. He had the day off, but he still came out. That was just his style. Rumor had it he was called out with the National Guard, but he wasn’t. He just showed up on his own time to save lives. Rico and I together must have saved 40 people that day. It seemed like we finished one rescue only to be called to another. We were able to get a couple of breaks, but it was the most exhausting experience of my life. They had what we call the safe zone, but this day even the safe zone was almost a wash out. Even in the safe zone, water was rushing all around us. I don’t think Rico ever took a break even though the rest of us did, because we kept getting new calls. Just when the rest of us were at our breaking points physically, Rico was back out pulling people to safety. He never turned down an opportunity for a rescue. He told me that he couldn’t rest while people were out waiting for help.

“You’ve probably seen those guys in action movies that are buff and in great shape, but you haven’t seen anybody in great shape until you’d seen Rico. We all thought he was superhuman and invincible until that day. I guess that was partly because he only arrived in the United States when he was 6 years old and worked to help his father. He helped his dad as a crop chopper. His dad took various harvesting and planting jobs to feed the family. Rico told me that his family always called it crop chopping. He never seemed to have it easy, and he never took the easy way out of anything. Rico said that’s part of the reason he became a firefighter and a soldier. He told me that America was his promised land, and he wanted to give back. He was always grateful to be in America. His gratefulness is the reason I’m here today.”

“Just as it was getting dark outside, we got our last call. It was for a lady who was stuck in a wash out just down the road from where we were. Word came down that she was pregnant and feeling labor pains. After hearing that, Rico volunteered us. He reminded me that his wife, Anna, was pregnant, and he couldn’t sit there and wait for the helicopter or for someone else to help her. We drove his truck through the washout to the rescue point. We could barely see the car through the rushing water and darkness. Rico was the first to jump out. We were told a helicopter was on the way, but it was busy picking up other people. I pulled the quarter out of my pocket to flip it just like we always did.”

“Flip it?” asked Bo.

“Yeah, we sometimes flipped a coin to see who had to go in. Rico could see I was drained of just about every ounce of energy and said, ‘This one’s on me, Kevin.’

“I told him no, and reminded him that he hadn’t had a break yet. He just said, ‘I’m good to go, Kev.’ You see, he knew I had just gotten back to work after a week off with the flu. I still wasn’t up to full speed, and he could tell.”

“You know this job has regular risk and danger, but we both knew that the car wasn’t going to make it. He knew going in the water that he probably wouldn’t make it out. He just wanted to make sure that she and the baby were safe. He just couldn’t get the pregnant woman and his wife out of his mind. We tied the rope to him, and he took off. Looking back, I know it was the right decision, because I really was too weak to do

that rescue. Right decision or not, I sometimes wish I'd gone out instead. For the last 13 years, I've relived every moment, wondering what we could have done differently. When I think about me going instead of him, I realize the woman and her baby wouldn't have made it. Rico knew he wouldn't make it out. He really, really knew, and that takes more courage than I've ever seen before or since. Rico saved my life that day, kid. He had been my best friend since we were kids.

"He's the kind of guy who touches lives even after his death. Did you hear of the Oak Valley Fire two years ago?"

"Yeah," said a curious Bo.

"Well, I was the first on the scene. I was driving down the road on my way home from the grocery store. I saw some kid was running down the street frantically waving his arms. His name was Carlos Perez. Carlos ran up to my car, screaming in Spanish. Fortunately for me, Rico taught me some Spanish when we were kids. I was able to make it to the house and get his family out before it was too late. If I didn't know Spanish, they wouldn't have made it out. That's how Rico saved lives even after his death.

"And to think that Rico and I met because I was trying to bully him on the playground."

"Bully him on the playground?" said Bo.

"Yeah, my buddy Tommy and I were giving him a hard time for not speaking English well. He showed us his baseball cards, and we became friends. Instead of cleaning our clocks that day, he just shared his cards and taught us Spanish."

"Kevin?" Mumbled Bo under his breath as it suddenly dawned on him who he was speaking to. "You're Kevin from the playground!" Bo mentioned.

"What?"

"Oh, nothing. This story is so amazing! Please, tell me the rest." Bo answered.

"Well, as I was saying, he taught us Spanish, and we helped him with English, of course, but it's the Spanish that has changed our lives. Tommy, Rico, and I used to be called the three amigos. It used to drive our teachers crazy when we would say things in Spanish that other people couldn't understand. We acted like secret spies in elementary school. Boy, those sure were good old days."

"That card collection was his most prized possession, but he even gave them to me after my mom passed away. He hoped they would cheer me up. His family was dirt poor, but he gave me what meant the most to him. After the flood, I had to pack up his locker here at the station, and I found his old journal. He kept the cards in his journal before he gave them to me. I put the cards back in the journal and gave it to his wife, Anna."

"So what ever happened to Tommy?" asked Bo.

"Well, Tommy started some business company down in South America, all because he could speak Spanish. He's now some big shot zillionaire, but we both know it's because of Rico. The man upstairs sure got it right when he made Rico."

"The three hardest things I've ever done in my life were to lose my best friend in the world, to call Tommy and tell him what happened, and then to drive Rico's truck home and tell Anna. I called Tommy first, because I just didn't know how to break the news to Anna. Tommy was crying too much to help me after I told him so I just drove Rico's truck to the house. I'm about as big a guy as you can get, but I bawled like a baby

the whole way to his house. I couldn't think of any way to tell her, but she knew when she saw me driving his truck. I sat in the driveway for a few minutes to try and stop crying, but she came outside and actually hugged me. She told me it was going to be okay. The first thing she said after I told her what happened and that he was gone was, 'Are the lady and baby okay?' I told her that they were going to be fine. I told her that we looked for hours, but we never found him."

After sitting and listening to the painfully emotional Captain speak about his best friend, Bo finally interrupted and said, "Captain, I haven't been entirely honest with you."

"What are you talking about, Bo?"

"Captain O'Malley, my mom was that lady. You saved my life that day and I'll never be able to thank you enough. I wanted to tell you sooner, but I didn't really know how. I mean, I feel pretty guilty considering how Rico was such a great guy and gave up his life saving mine."

Kevin sat speechless at the desk for a moment and stared at Bo. His eyes welled up again. He buried his head in his hands and responded, "You shouldn't feel guilty, you should feel thankful! Rico did what came most natural to him."

"What's that?"

"Helping people in their time of need."

"I've always been thankful. Since I was seven, I've carried the newspaper article about the flood in my wallet. For what it's worth, thank you."

"It means a lot, Bo. I'd say that your welcome, but it's Rico who really deserves the thanks. I've often wondered what ever happened to the people we rescued."

"I've had a pretty average life until recently."

"There's a reason you survived. You have a life calling."

"A what?"

"A calling in life. Your purpose for being you. I don't believe that it was just pure luck that you were rescued and Rico died. Only the man upstairs understands the mysteries of life. Just do me a favor and live your life to the fullest."

"I will, Captain. Can I ask you one more question?"

"You bet."

"Was there anything that could have been done to save him?"

"I've thought about that for 13 years. The two things we do differently now are we use two rescue lines, and this thing here," said Kevin as he pulled something out of his desk drawer.

"People call it the creek pulley. This buckle has been around for over sixty years, we just didn't know about it. After we lost Rico, some old man named Joe Vierra came into the firehouse and gave this to us. I recognized him from Rico's memorial service. He used to be a Santa Cruz Mountain Boy during World War II. Apparently, he read the newspaper article about our problem with the safety lines and thought this would help.

"It's really ingenious. It has an automatic release that will allow you to go from one safety line to another without ever unhooking. The different pulleys on it allow us to be pulled vertically by choppers or even horizontally to glide over danger areas. This is exactly what we needed for Rico! We just didn't have it back then. Guys like Rico will always give their rescue rope up to someone else. If he had this, he could have connected it to your mother, without risking himself."

“May I borrow the creek pulley to show with my report Captain?” asked Bo, who really planned to use it to rewrite history.

“You bet kid. Now, I better get back to my reports. Feel free to take a look around the station and talk to the guys. There’s a lot of neat stuff here. Maybe we can recruit you someday. There’s always room for one more.”

“Thanks, Captain.”

CHAPTER 23

WINDS OF TIME

While Bo and Jordi worked their missions, Ricky thought he ought to talk to Redhorse about his idea. Aside from being nervous about the next adventure, Ricky thought he should double check with Redhorse. If for no other reason, to show respect for the gift he had been given.

Ricky arrived at school much earlier than normal on this day. He was there partly for lack of being able to sleep, but mostly because he hoped he could catch Redhorse when nobody else was around. As he wandered the halls, he sensed his world was changing before his eyes. He felt butterflies rumbling in his stomach when he thought that he might actually get his dad back.

Just as before, Ricky went to the boiler room. Again he heard, "Welcome back my friend," as he stepped through the door. This time the greeting was different because Redhorse was facing away from Ricky.

"Hello, Redhorse. How'd you know it was me?" asked a puzzled Ricky.

"Your spirit surrounds you, my friend. Sometimes life teaches us to see with our hearts and minds, instead of our eyes. Our eyes and ears deceive us and take us on the wrong journey. For the answers you seek, I tell you the answer is in your heart. My friend, your life has been a peaceful, yet lonely walk. You were chosen for this journey. Since your journey began, you've witnessed changes in the lives around you. You have been challenged and tested. Throughout your tests you chose peace. For that you are rewarded."

"Rewarded?" asked Ricky.

"For most, the winds of time blow once. You've been granted a chance to feel the winds of time blow twice. Let your heart be your guide."

Ricky was confused at the old man's words, yet he thought he understood the point Redhorse was making. "So if I go to the flood and help my dad, I won't screw up history?"

"Helping someone in their greatest time of need is always the path to choose. The story of life is much greater than one event my friend," answered Redhorse.

"Thanks Redhorse, but how did you know what I was going to ask you?" said Ricky.

"Wisdom sees without eyes and ears, my friend," answered Redhorse said.

"How will I know when my journey should end?" said Ricky.

"You will know. At that time, we will complete your journey. Until then, enjoy the journey my friend," said the old man.

"Thanks, Redhorse."

Ricky was both confused and in awe of the gift he was given. He wasn't sure of anything now, except he still so desperately wanted a dad. The dad he read about, heard about, even the dad he just met. There would certainly be more for him to consider once Bo told him the firehouse story.

CHAPTER 24

MAKING HISTORY

Believe it or not, the three boys agreed to skip school that day. Cutting school wasn't a big deal for Bo, but for Ricky and Jordi it was unheard of. They didn't feel very guilty about it though, because they knew it was for a good cause.

Ricky hurried out after talking to Redhorse and returned home to see the two new buddies waiting for him on the doorstep. Aside from all of the weirdness of the bookmark, seeing Jordi and Bo sitting on his front steps talking and laughing was just about the strangest thing Ricky had ever seen in his life.

Ricky walked up and said, "Hey, guys, what'd ya learn?"

"You gotta sit down for this one," said Bo.

"Okay, how about you Jordi?"

"Well, I thought my info was pretty cool, but wait til you hear Bo's," said Jordi.

"What'd ya get?" asked Ricky.

"Well, you're never going to believe it, but the captain at the firehouse is that little Kevin kid from the playground. He was your dad's partner the day of the flood. He said that he should have gone, but your dad went instead because Kevin was kinda sick. He said if it were him and not your dad doing the rescue, he, my mom, and I would have been goners for sure. I really wish you had been there. He told me so many things about your dad. Ya remember that stuff on the playground, about teaching those kids Spanish?"

"Yeah?" said Ricky, wondering where this was going.

"Well, he told me your dad taught him and Tommy Spanish after all, and that Tommy's now some zillionaire in South America. He also told me he was able to save some lives last year at the Oak Valley Fire because of your dad. Get this: he was driving down the street and some kid flagged him down and yelled some Spanish at him. He said that he hurried to the house and rescued the family just in time. And it was all because your dad taught him Spanish when they were kids. The super freaky thing is that your dad wouldn't have taught them Spanish if it weren't for you being at the playground that day. Dude, it hurts my head just thinking about all of the connections and twists we keep coming across."

"What did he say about the technology and doing anything different?" asked Ricky.

"That's another freaky thing, he said that your dad knew going in that he wouldn't make it out. It was just the type of guy your dad is or was. He said that your dad had his own rescue line, but he gave it to my mom just to be sure that nothing would go wrong. He knew he would die when he saved us: he was just trying to make sure my mom and I were safe. I know you want to go it alone next time, but after all that has happened, Ricky, I just gotta go there with you. There aren't enough people like him in the world!"

"Oh yeah, the Captain also gave me this bracket contraption. He said they call it the creek pulley," said Bo, pulling the pulley mechanism out of his bag. "He said that some old man named Joe gave it to them after your dad died. This allows them to be pulled up by a chopper or to glide over dangerous areas like the floodwater. He told me that this is exactly what your dad needed that day!"

"Thanks for doing that for me," said Ricky.

“Ricky, whatever you need me to do, just tell me.”

“Okay, Jordi, what did you find out?”

“Well, I sat my little techno-computer geeky self down and surfed the Web. I scoured the Cal-history site and read all about the flood. It was kind of gross and scary looking at some of the rescue photos taken that day. There were a couple pictures of your dad right before the wash out. Ricky, just like Bo said I’m going in with you next time. Your dad was a flippin’ superman. One of the pictures showed him standing straight up with water rushing all around him at chest level. He was doing this without the rescue line while lifting Bo and his mom up in the air. Dude, it brought tears to my eyes.

“That was all pretty cool,” said Jordi, “but what I found that might help us was on the link to the Santa Cruz Mountain Boys site and the California National Guard Web site. Aside from interviewing Joe Vierra personally, the web site is where I got most of my research.”

“You know Joe Vierra?”

“I do now. If you hadn’t gotten kicked out of the presentations, you’d have heard me talk about that pulley.”

“Yeah, yeah, I was an idiot and I’m sorry. Give me a clean slate and I’ll dazzle you!”

“I’ll give you a clean slate if you’ll promise me no more swirly’s.”

Bo hung his head down low and said, “Man, Guys, I’m so sorry!”

“I’m just kidding, Bo. We’re on the same team now!”

“Thanks.”

“I was reading along just for giggles when I came across some photos of the Santa Cruz Mountain Boys. There were a couple of photos of the soldiers hooked up to the creek pulley.”

“Yeah, so what do you think we should do, Jordi?” asked Ricky.

“To make a long story short, I agree with Bo that the creek pulley is the way to go. I think we should rig this up just like Vierra did for his guys, that way your dad would never even touch the water,” said Jordi.

“How do we connect the pulleys to keep him above the water?” asked a determined Ricky.

“I wondered about that too. I’ve thought about it a lot and I think we can use your dad’s truck and the tree that was keeping the car from washing away. There was a truck in the pictures I saw, and I think it was your dad’s. If we can connect a rope with the bracket to your dad’s truck, then all he will have to do is wrap it around the tree. Once it’s connected to the tree, that sucker ain’t going anywhere, and he’ll be able to slide across just like the Santa Cruz Mountain Boys did,” said Jordi.

“What do you think, Bo?” asked Ricky.

“It makes sense to me, but how do we get Rico to use it?” he answered.

“I guess that’s our next step. So we’re all in this together?” said Ricky.

“Let’s go make history,” said Jordi.

“Well, I’ve always wanted to see what I looked like as a baby anyway,” said Bo. “Let’s go for it.”

“Okay, so my part in this whole thing was to talk to Redhorse,” said Ricky. “I just met with him to check it all out, but he wouldn’t tell me anything. What he said seemed kind of confusing, but one thing does stand out. It was the only thing I

understood. He said that the winds of time only blow once for people, but that I was in a window of time where the winds blow twice. I think he meant that I can go in and help my dad and get back out without messing up the future. The guy greeted me when I walked through the door, and he hadn't even seen me."

"Hey, Ricky, what's a guy like that doing in that job? I mean, if he has all this knowledge or power, why isn't he, like, some rich guy somewhere?" asked Bo.

Ricky answered simply by saying, "Bo, wealth and wisdom don't go hand in hand."

Now that all three were in agreement, they sat around and made final plans for the, who, what, when, where, and how's of the mission.

CHAPTER 25

THE FLOOD REVISITED

After making final plans and getting everything together for the mission, the three boys looked at each other with great anticipation. Ricky once again said, “We’ve come a long way, guys. I appreciate what you’re doing for me. It’s not too late to change your minds. If you want out, I understand.

“We’re with you till the end!”

“That’s right!”

“Thanks guys. If this doesn’t work, I want you to know how thankful I am to have friends like you all. Just make sure you visualize the safe zone, the last thing we need is to get washed away and need rescuing ourselves.”

Bo answered, “I just want to tell you guys that I’m sorry for being a jerk to you. Thanks for giving me another chance.”

Jordi’s response was, “Bo, it’s nice to be on this side of a friendship with you. You’re a lot more fun to be around this way.”

“It’s a crazy thing, Bo. If you hadn’t been such a jerk, we wouldn’t be here now trying to get my dad back. Sounds crazy, but thanks,” said Ricky.

“On three, guys. Ready?” said Ricky.

“One”,

“Two. Oh, wait a second. After this is all over, I’m taking you guys to a ball game, okay?”

“Hey Ricky, do you think this is the best time to talk sports?” said Jordi.

“One, two, three.”

Faster than a blink, all of the visions in their heads about that day became reality.

The sound of rainfall was deafening. They landed in the safe zone, but water was still rushing all around them. It was darker than even their imaginations had pictured. They looked around and saw people scattering. They heard the faint sounds of the nearby helicopter.

“Jordi, remember that your job is to protect the bookmark. You stay here with the book, okay? Bo and I are going to find him.”

Jordi looked down at his legs and saw the water rushing at almost knee level, yelled, “I’ll stay here!”

They scanned the area but had a hard time finding Rico. The difficulty was partly because of the rain, but mostly because it was so late in the day and darkness was falling

“Is that the truck?” asked Bo.

“Yeah, but where is he?”

As they looked around, they suddenly heard those fateful words:

“Hey, Rico, it’s my turn. You did the last three. Take a break already,” said the stranger.

“I’m good to go, Kev,” was the answer. “You’re not up to full speed. I’m worried about you going out there. I don’t think you can make it,” said Rico.

“Rico, I don’t think anybody can make it in these conditions. Let’s wait for the chopper to get here!” yelled Kevin, as the rain attempted to mute all other sounds.

“I might not make it, but I can’t help but think about Anna and my baby boy on the way. If we wait, that thing is washing out for sure. You and I both know that car

won't last five minutes the way it's hanging on. I have to, Kev! I would want somebody to help my wife."

"There he is, on the other side of the truck!" yelled Ricky.

In the heat of the moment, Ricky forgot all about the plan and just ran over to Rico and said, "Hey! A friend of mine wanted me to bring this to you!"

"What are you doing here? This place is going to wash out any minute!" said Kevin.

Ricky turned to Rico and said, "This can help you! It's another safety line. It's all rigged and ready. Please, use it!"

"I already have a safety line!" said Rico.

"Yeah, but the chopper's not here yet and you'll use it for her! Use this one for yourself!"

Rico turned to Kevin and said, "What do you think?"

"It can't hurt. Give it a shot," said Kevin.

"Thanks, kid, but I don't have time to waste. I got this line on, and I don't have time for another. That car is going any minute now," said Rico starting off without the line.

Ricky looked over at Bo and yelled, "Hook your end to the truck! I'm going in!"

Ricky took off running with determination like never before as he realized that Rico was following the path of history. As Rico made his way to the car, Ricky actually ran upstream to get a little lead with the water rushing like a runaway train. He ran upstream, and dove out as far as he could and waited to be slammed into the car by the raging water. Upon slamming into the car, he quickly reached for the tree and hooked up. He then looked down into the car and saw Rico holding a baby and looking up.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING, KID? YOU'RE GOING TO GET US KILLED!" screamed Rico.

"I'M SAVING YOUR LIFE, DAD! I MEAN, DUDE! SEE, I TOLD YOU THAT YOU WOULDN'T USE THE SAFETY LINE FOR YOURSELF!" yelled Ricky, watching Rico hook the young woman to his line.

"I HAVE TO, THE CHOPPER ISN'T HERE YET!" Rico yelled back.

"HERE, TAKE THIS AND HOOK IT TO YOUR BELT. I HAVE TWO LINES. I HEAR THE CHOPPER COMING. WHAT SHOULD I DO?" screamed Ricky.

"STAY OUT OF THE WAY WHILE I GET THEM IN THE RESCUE BASKET. HERE, HOLD THE BABY CLOSE TO HER WHILE I HELP HER OUT. THIS CAR'S ABOUT TO WASH OUT. KEEP THE BLANKET LOOSELY OVER HIS FACE SO THE RAIN WON'T GO IN HIS MOUTH," yelled Rico.

After taking the baby in his arms, Ricky watched Rico pull the mother out of the car, which was rapidly filling up with water. The basket dropped down as soon as the chopper arrived. While holding the baby, Ricky gawked at the superhuman actions of the father he always dreamed of knowing. Rico loaded the lady in the basket and followed up by strapping in her new son. She quickly screamed the fateful words, "What about you?"

Rico said, "I'll be fine. I've got my guardian angel right here," he said pointing to Ricky. Rico signaled to the chopper, as she and the baby were carried to safety. Just as soon as the chopper took off, the car washed out. Ricky and Rico were left clinging to the tree. Unfortunately, the car uprooted the tree that had been a key lifeline for this

rescue. Both Ricky and Rico were swept into the raging water helplessly dangling from the safety lines.

Unlike the newspaper articles that Ricky had read, this ending would be much different. Although the tree uprooted, Bo had hooked the line up to the truck well enough for Kevin to back it up and pull them out.

They both got out of the water and just stood and stared at each other. Kevin stayed in the truck and laid his head over the steering wheel and dashboard in relief.

"Thanks, kid!" Rico said. "What's your name?"

"Ricky."

"That makes it easy. That's my name. My wife is pregnant and we're having a boy. I'm going to name my son after you. I hope he is a lot like you someday!" said Rico.

Ricky quickly responded by saying, "No, I hope he's a lot like you someday!"

Rico quickly turned to Jordi and said, "Hey kid, put down my journal!"

Jordi was at a loss of words and only answered, "It's not your journal."

Ricky quickly interrupted, "We met on the playground when you were seven. That's my journal. Do you remember the three of us?" asked Ricky.

"What?" said Rico in total disbelief.

"How's my card collection coming along? Did Kevin and Tommy help you make good trades?" said Ricky.

Thirty years of mystery behind the kind strangers on the playground flooded his mind. He knew that only the people on the playground would know what had happened that day.

"Ricky? Is that you?" questioned Rico, suddenly thinking he was crazy.

"It's me, Rico. Thanks for taking care of my card collection all these years!" said Ricky.

"I was just joking about the angel stuff out there, but are you really my guardian angel? You haven't changed in 20 years. Are you here for the cards?" asked Rico.

"I'm not a guardian angel, but like you I'm here to help. It's too long of a story to tell you now. Keep the cards. Your son will probably want them someday," said Ricky.

Rico reached out and gave Ricky the biggest bear hug of his life and said, "That's twice that you've come to my rescue. Thanks, Ricky. I always wondered what happened to you. When will I ever see you again?"

Enjoying the first hug from his dad, Ricky hugged Rico right back and said, "No, thank you. It's because of you that I am who I am. I'm sure that I'll see you real soon, Rico, but we should get out of here soon."

Kevin finally regained his composure enough to get out of the truck. He sloshed through the water and hugged Rico. With tears in his eyes he yelled, "Don't ever do that to me again! I thought I lost you out there!"

"I'm fine Kev! Come on now, you're sounding like my wife. Don't tell Anna that I pushed it to the limit today, okay?"

Kevin only mumbled out some more teary words and then looked at Ricky and barked out, "Kid, you're either the dumbest guy in the world, or the bravest! Either way, thanks for saving his life!"

"Anytime," Ricky answered.

“What is that thing?” asked Kevin pointing at the creek pulley still connecting Ricky to Rico.

“It’s the creek pulley that the Santa Cruz Mountain Boys used in World War II. My friend Bo there is doing a report on the Santa Cruz Mountain Boys for school. We saw you guys and figured you could use it.”

“So you just happened to be in the area with this thing and realized that maybe we could use it?”

“Pretty much.”

“What are the odds, Rico? See partner, I told you that you had nine lives. I thought you were a goner out there!” said Kevin.

“Kevin, this is Ricky. We’re old friends,” said Rico.

“You know each other?”

“Yeah, Ricky always seems to be at the right place at the right time!” answered Rico.

“How does that thing work?”

“It has an automatic release that allows you to be pulled vertically or held horizontally. I guess these pulleys are controlled by this releasing arm. Why don’t you guys keep it. Joe has a bunch of them.”

“Thanks kid, you guys just saved my best friends life. For that, I can never thank you enough!” said Kevin.

“I guess we should get out of here before this water gets any higher. See you soon, Rico!” hoped Ricky.

Ricky walked over to Jordi and Bo and said, “Let’s go home.” The three waited for Kevin and Rico to turn their backs. They clutched the book and in a flash, were back home.

“Good job, guys!” he said, giving them the high-five.

Jordi quickly chimed in and said, “I didn’t even need to be out there hearing everything to be totally blown away. How about you, Bo?”

Bo just giggled and said, “Ricky, did I just see you cradle me in your arms out there?”

“Yeah, this ride keeps getting wilder and wilder,” said Ricky.

CHAPTER 26

RICO RETURNS

“So, now what?” asked Jordi.

“What do you mean, Jordi?” asked Ricky.

“What are we supposed to do now? We rescued him and supposedly changed history. Aren’t we supposed to feel different or something?” asked Jordi.

“I’m not sure,” answered Ricky.

“I feel different, but not the science fiction movie kind of different. Just different because of what I just experienced. I can’t believe that I just saw myself being born!”

“Guys I don’t know what’s going to happen. I was hoping that if we rescued him, it would be like he never left. Redhorse just told me that the winds of time are blowing twice for me,” said Ricky.

“Sure would be nice to have an instruction manual for the bookmark, huh?” said Jordi.

“He basically told me to do the right thing and help people with the bookmark. I thought that’s what we did. Plus, when I spoke to Redhorse about rescuing my dad, he told me about the window in the winds of time,” said Ricky.

“Should we just wait and see?” asked Bo.

“I don’t know, I guess so,” said Ricky.

“Hey Guys, I have an idea! What if we call the firehouse and ask if Rico’s there? I mean, if we rescued him, shouldn’t he be there now?” yelled Jordi.

“Yeah!” yelled Bo as Ricky ran to the kitchen counter and grabbed the phone book. While thumbing through the phone book, he suddenly remembered the number to the firehouse. “This is really weird!”

“What is?”

Just to make sure, he finished looking up the number in the book and noticed that his memory was correct.

“I remembered the number as I was looking it up,” said Ricky.

“What’s weird about that?” asked Bo.

“I’ve never dialed that number before in my life!” said Ricky.

“Maybe the winds of time are starting to blow or whatever they’re supposed to do?” said Jordi with a puzzled look.

Ricky dialed the number and breathlessly waited for the answer. It took four rings before anyone picked up the phone.

“Santa Cruz Fire, O’Malley speaking. May I help you?” answered the person on the other end of the line.

“Yes Sir. I was wondering if Rico’s there?”

“Who?” asked O’Malley.

“Rico Cardenez. May I speak to Rico Cardenez please?” asked Ricky.

The phone line went silent for a few seconds as Ricky waited for an answer.

“Sorry buddy, he’s not here anymore. He left us a long time ago,” said O’Malley, as Ricky grew very sullen thinking O’Malley was referring to losing Rico in the flood.

Ricky was too focused on the phone conversation to notice what was happening behind him. As he spoke, Jordi and Bo noticed something moving towards the driveway. They simultaneously grabbed Ricky’s shoulder and turned him around in order for him to

see a truck moving into the driveway. At the same time they grabbed his shoulder, he heard O'Malley mention, "Yeah, he went home a while ago, but said that he was running a few errands first. Is that you, Ricky?"

Knowing what that question meant, Ricky was instantly filled with elation and answered, "Yeah, it's me!" as he turned and saw his dad's truck pulling into the driveway.

"Thanks! See ya!" yelled Ricky.

"Hey Ricky? Tell your dad that we all need to go surfing again real soon. Okay?"

"I will. Thanks!" said Ricky as he hung up the phone smiling like never before. Overwhelmed with the shock of a lifetime of dreams finally being introduced to reality, Ricky only said, "Is it him? Is it really him?"

"That's his truck!" shouted Jordi.

"It is!" shouted Ricky as they saw Rico getting out of the truck.

"It really worked! Wow, he looks older too!" yelled Bo, as the three ran out of the house to the driveway.

"He's older because, as crazy as it sounds, it's been 13 years since the flood," yelled Jordi.

As Rico stepped out of the truck, Ricky ran over and began hugging him. Suddenly, Rico realized that Ricky wasn't just a guardian angel. Ricky was his son. After a couple moments of silence, Rico pulled his journal out of the truck and said, "Thanks, guys. If I didn't experience it, I would never believe it."

"What, Dad?" asked Ricky, just to be sure.

"Helping me at the flood with this," said Rico holding up the creek pulley.

"How did you remember it?" asked Bo.

"Well, I kept thinking that I was crazy because all kinds of memories and thoughts were swimming around in my head until I found this," said Rico, holding up his journal. "I got back to the station and found what I thought was my journal to make notes in, when I found this newspaper clipping in the spot that I was supposed to write in today. I opened it up and saw this article about me washing out and dying in the flood," said Rico as he held the article about the flood.

Rico, Bo and Ricky all looked over at Jordi. "Did I mix the two journals up?"

"Yep," Rico answered.

"Well, they do look a lot alike. I put it down on the car seat because it was getting rained on and I sure didn't want to get stuck in the flood. I decided to put the journal in the truck. The article about the flood must have fallen out. The glue didn't hold in the rain. It's probably a good thing we made the photocopy of the article, huh? I must have put the photocopy in his journal by mistake. The rain probably made the article stick to the journal page so we could still transition. At least I didn't lose the feather though."

"Feather?" asked Rico.

"This bookmark is a real angel's feather, Dad. We used it in your journal to go back into the flood. That's how we were able to rescue you."

"How'd you use it to rescue me?"

"I know it may sound crazy, Dad, but like I said, the feather is like some kind of magic bookmark. The feather is from an Angel's wing from over a thousand years ago.

One of our ancestors was given this and it has been passed down through the generations. We can adventure in any book we place it in. When Redhorse first gave me the bookmark, I adventured on my own. Then Jordi and I went together until I got stuck in *Jack and the Beanstalk*. That was when Bo and Jordi had to rescue me from the giant. It was after they rescued me that we came up with the idea to use your journal to meet you. I know it sounds far-fetched, but I spent my whole life without you, Dad. I would have done anything to get to know you.”

“Am I losing my mind? How can this be real? You guys went into *Jack and the Beanstalk*? So when you guys came and helped me on the playground, the journal you used was really mine?” asked Rico.

“Yeah, and that was when we realized we might be able to use the article about the flood to try and rescue you. At first, I just thought we would use the journal so I could get to know you better than just the stories I’ve heard about you. I thought I could go into your journal a few times and see you during different periods of your life. Then I remembered that Redhorse told me the feather could be used in anything that needed a bookmark. All of a sudden, it hit me that we might be able to glue the article in the journal and go back to the flood to rescue you,” said Ricky.

“I’ve got to hand it to you guys, you really work well together,” said Rico.

“Seeing as how I’m just getting here, have you guys been buddies all your life?”

“Just for a couple days now, Mr. Cardenez,” said Bo. “My mom was the lady you rescued at the flood. Thanks!”

“Just doing my job, Bo, but I guess you rescued me, too!” said Rico.

“Hi! Mr. Cardenez, my name is Jordi. Until three days ago, your son was my bodyguard. He protected me from Bo.”

“Ricky seems to have a knack for saving the day!” said Rico.

“Yeah, he even helped Max Broadwater with me yesterday!” said Jordi.

“What? You rescued THE MAX BROADWATER? How’d you do that?” asked an astonished Rico.

“We helped each other. He taught us how to play ball when we helped him field a team for a pick-up game.”

“You’ve got to be kidding, you played ball with Max Broadwater? He’s is one of my greatest heroes? He’s not just a great athlete, but a great person, too! He’s done a lot over the years to help needy kids.”

“Yeah, Mr. Cardenez, it was pretty awesome playing with him,” said Jordi.

“Guys, after all we’ve been through together, just call me, Rico.”

Jordi and Bo simultaneously said, “Okay”.

“Can I call you Dad?” laughed Ricky who tried to make light of the significance of his ability to finally call someone dad.

“You got it buddy!” affirmed Rico as he patted Ricky on the back.

“Thanks, Dad!” answered Ricky.

“Hey guys who is this Redhorse person?” asked Rico.

“He’s the assistant building manager at school. He gave me the bookmark,” said Ricky.

“Why? I mean this is one of those science fiction movie kind of things, but it’s real,” said Rico.

“I really don’t know Dad. Redhorse just told me that I could use it to help people.

Maybe we could go by the school tomorrow morning so you could meet him,” said Ricky.

“I’d really love to get to the bottom of this and thank him,” said Rico.

“Me too!” affirmed Ricky.

CHAPTER 27 COMPLETING THE JOURNEY

Ricky and Rico went very early to school the next morning. They headed directly for the boiler room just as Ricky had done before. As they entered the room, Mr. Scott, the building manager, asked, "Can I help you?"

"Hey, Mr. Scott, I'm looking for Redhorse," said Ricky.

"Who?" asked Mr. Scott.

"Redhorse, your new helper here?" asked Ricky.

"I don't know what you're talking about, kid. I've been asking for an assistant for years, but I've never gotten one," said the man.

"His name is Redhorse, and he gave this to me," said Ricky pulling the feather out of his bag. "He said he's a helper. I thought he was your assistant or something."

"I'm sorry, buddy; I don't have a clue what you're talking about."

"Are you sure?" asked Ricky.

"I'm positive," answered Mr. Scott.

"Come on, Ricky, let's get going," said Rico.

"Wait a minute, is your name, Ricky?" asked a very puzzled Mr. Scott.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I don't think I've ever seen anything stranger in my life. This must be for you. It was sitting on my desk when I got here this morning."

Ricky's jaw just about hit the floor when he saw the envelope with his name on it. "Thanks!" He said, lunging forward to retrieve it.

"Do you have any idea how this got here? I'm the last person to leave the school at night and I always lock my office," asked the manager.

"No, sir. But I bet it's from Redhorse," answered Ricky.

"Who the heck is Redhorse?" asked Mr. Scott.

"If he's not the building assistant, I don't know who he is," answered Ricky.

"How about opening that envelope now? I'm getting freaked out."

"Sorry, but I better read this at home. Thanks for your help, Mr. Scott."

"No problem."

A very confused Ricky and Rico left the school. Ricky waited until he arrived home to see what was inside the envelope. He sat down on his bed and opened the envelope. He unfolded it and began to read:

Hello, my friend:

Well done! Again, you have chosen well. You chose the welfare of others before yourself. As you already know, I am not a helper at the school. I am a helper for the Great Maker.

You will learn more in due time. Enjoy your breeze from the winds of time.

Redhorse

“A helper for the Great Maker? What does that mean?” Ricky asked himself.

A deluge of thoughts flooded his mind. “What am I supposed to do with the bookmark now?” Ricky figured that the feathers journey with him had ended now that he had his dad back. He wondered if Rico had taken Redhorse’s place, now that Redhorse was gone and Rico was back home. Ricky was not sure what to think, but came to this conclusion as nothing else seemed to explain how his dad appeared so quickly and Redhorse disappeared. He thought it was also eerie that nobody else had any memories of the Redwood Valley Flood other than Rico being a great hero who barely survived.

“Could that be what he meant when he said his journey would end and that I am now the carrier,” thought Ricky.

Ricky and his dad weren’t sure if they would hear from Redhorse again, but they figured, Redhorse knew where to find Ricky.

Ricky and Rico decided to tuck the feather away in a safe location until they could find out more about it, or wait until they could speak with Redhorse. They planned to keep the bookmarks existence and location a secret.

CHAPTER 28

CHANGES WITH THE THREE AMIGOS

The Three Amigos had changes indeed. Ricky, Jordi, and Bo continued to be inseparable after the adventures and the rescue. They hung around together inside and outside of school. There were so many obvious changes in all three boys that it was difficult to tell whose life had changed the most.

The greatest change for Ricky was finally having the dad he had always dreamed of. After the rescue, his family settled into the new routine, although his mom still had no clue about what happened. She thought the new routine was life as usual, but couldn't figure out why Rico seemed so ditzy sometimes. Anna believed Rico was literally losing his mind. She often grew frustrated with him for forgetting some of the family routines that she thought were normal for them. Rico's new found forgetfulness became so ridiculous that he seriously considered telling Anna about the bookmark. They figured that it would freak her out even worse by introducing her to the bookmark.

Rico told Ricky that they would be taking a father/son vacation to Catalina Island in the near future. At the island, they hoped to get away from everybody and just spend some quality time together as father and son. Ricky also hoped to fill Rico in on some of the remaining details of the memories that continued to flood his mind after the rescue.

Jordi's life also changed drastically. After almost two years of not being able to safely use his assigned locker, he finally began using it and retired the old briefcase. Ironically, Bo was the person who helped Jordi figure out how to use the combination to open the locker. Jordi loved having the locker so much that he decorated it and even put a mini-stereo system inside it. Although stereos were against the rules, Mr. Titus, the school's principal overlooked it and let Jordi be the locker room disc jockey, as long as he didn't let the volume get too loud.

Of all the changes that the three experienced, Bo was still undergoing some. After the rescue, Jordi finally asked him a question that had nagged him for a while.

"Why were you so mean all that time, Bo?"

"Well, I guess I was pretty angry at the world when my dad and mom split up. After that happened, I suddenly moved up here with my mom.

"When they told me that they were getting a divorce, they acted like it was a pretty, sugar coated thing. They said that they were still great friends. I didn't care if they were great friends or not; I just wanted my family together. What they didn't realize was that not only were they divorcing, they were also making my brother and I divorce each other as well! They were divorcing me from a life I was really happy with!"

"How's that?"

"Never again would we be a family. I felt like so much was being taken from me, and I had no control over it."

"Was the worst part not having any say or control in it?" asked Jordi.

"No, the worst part was actually having say!"

"Why?" asked Jordi.

"Because the judge made me choose who I wanted to live with."

"How's that?" asked Jordi.

"It's the law. Apparently I'm old enough to choose. How can a kid choose one parent over another? It felt like they were making us say that we loved one parent more

than the other. I told my parents that I'd never make a choice. But then my older brother chose my dad."

"What did you do?"

"I didn't want to choose either one of them, but I felt sorry for my mom. I didn't want her to be alone, so I finally made my choice, if you could call it that."

"I can see how that would put me over the edge! Is that what finally got to you?" asked Jordi.

"No. What really sent me over the edge was when they told me they were going to take me somewhere for divorce counseling. It seemed like punishment to say I needed counseling because they were getting the divorce. They were the one's messing everything up, not me! I kept telling them I hadn't changed. They really didn't listen to me, so finally I figured if they wanted change, they'd get it."

"Well, I for one think you made the right decision, Bo. Beatin' the tar out of me for two years was much better than going to counseling," chuckled Jordi as he patted Bo on the back. "No, I'm just kidding!"

"Man, Jordi, I can't ever take that stuff back, but I am so sorry. I don't know how, but someday I will make it up to you. For over 12 years, I thought life was pretty good. Then all of a sudden, it felt like the ground was jerked out from under me. I was so angry that I didn't know what to do. The one thing I really could control was trying to make your life as miserable as I thought mine was. Obviously, the counseling would have made all of our lives easier."

"It may sound corny, but I've really forgotten all of that stuff already. Not so much because I wanted to, but because I feel like I know the real you now," said Jordi.

"Thanks, man!" said Bo

"I guess there is one thing that I still haven't forgotten yet," said Jordi.

"What's that?"

"The swirly. Now that was really nasty! But at least you were nice enough to flush before dunking me."

Bo buried his head in his arms and sighed in shame. "Jordi, I'd go right now and give myself a swirly if I thought that'd help!"

"You'd better not. My dad just used the toilet, and I wouldn't wish that punishment on my worst enemy, let alone a friend. He can really kill the bathroom sometimes!" giggled Jordi as he fanned the air in front of his face and pretended to plug his nose.

"Thanks, man. I was hoping you wouldn't hold me to it."

"Being friends now makes it all worthwhile."

"I don't know where my life would have been headed if all of this hadn't happened," said Bo.

"Hey, Bo, what the heck do you think this carrier thing is about?" asked Jordi.

"I don't know, man, but I'll be there whenever you guys need me."

"Thanks."

"Hey, Jordi, do you think all of this bookmark stuff is really over? When I think about how much it's helped us, I can't help but think that it could help other people as well. I really like doing good stuff, ya know?"

"Yeah, me too! But I think Ricky and his dad should just have some time to pal around."

“Yeah, I guess your right, but maybe later,” answered Bo.

“Hey Bo, what do you think Matt and Zach are up to these days?”

“I’m not sure what Matt’s doing. I think he’s been hanging out around his family a lot more.”

“Pretty freaked out, huh?” asked Jordi.

“I can sure understand why!” said Bo.

“Yeah, no kidding! What about Zach?”

“I’m not sure, but I thought I saw him drive by me the other day. I waved, but he acted like he didn’t know me.”

“Well that’s understandable. He’s probably pretty freaked out too!”

“Yeah, I know, but he was riding in Irish’s car.”

“He was with Irish? What’s he thinking?”

Pete Irish was the person they were talking about. Pete Irish is the guy Bo was on his way to becoming had he not turned his life around.

“I’ll try to talk to him about it at school next week,” said Bo.

Bo couldn’t quite understand it enough to tell the other guys, but ideas were stirring inside of him. Only in the days to come would Ricky and Jordi learn how Bo wanted to change the world one person at a time. The world would soon come to know the Secret Samaritans, a circle of people dedicated to helping others in their hour of need.

While waiting to pay for coffee and donuts after church on a Sunday morning, Bo would meet destiny head on. Three seemingly insignificant items would change him forever. Items he had seen so many times before, but never would they have more meaning than on this day. A small jar of pocket change, a photo and a note on the counter at 7 eleven would serve as Bo’s motivation to convince Ricky to continue adventuring with the bookmark.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

G. Hardy was born into an Army family in El Paso, Texas. He spent most of his childhood in a suburb of Washington, D.C., before moving to Morgantown, West Virginia to pursue a business degree with an emphasis in German studies at West Virginia University.

After spending some time on active duty with the United States Army, he moved to Colorado where he earned his Colorado Teachers License and earned a Masters Degree in Education from Regis University.

Hardy currently teaches 6th grade language arts/social studies at Holmes Middle School in Colorado Spring, Colorado. He resides in Colorado Springs with his wife and three children.

“The Santa Cruz Mountain Boys” is the third book written by Gary Hardy. His goal for writing is to provide life lessons with an entertaining format that will teach kids the values of honesty, loyalty, respect, and perseverance.

WHICH BOOK WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

Imagine you had a bookmark that would allow you to adventure into the book of your choice! That's the choice Ricky Cardenez gets to make.

Just when Ricky is at his wits end, being bullied worse than ever by the three meanest kids in school, a mysterious man appears and rescues him. The man gives Ricky a bookmark that was fashioned from an angel's feather. The feather has been passed down through the generations for over a thousand years. It's not just any ordinary bookmark though, it's magic. Redhorse (the mysterious stranger), tells Ricky that the bookmark has magical powers that will allow him to adventure into any book where the bookmark is placed.

As Ricky adventures, he is amazed and awed at what the bookmark can do. Ricky soon gets the notion to use the bookmark in an attempt to relive history and make his greatest wish come true – to meet the father he's never known.

Strap on your seatbelt and join the exciting adventures with the modern day knights also known as The Santa Cruz Mountain Boys!

A Classroom Guide for

The Santa Cruz Mountain Boys

Based on the novel written by G. Hardy

This guide is written and produced by G. Hardy

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this guide is to assist the classroom teacher or literary resource teacher in promoting critical thinking skills and improving comprehension skills in the reader. The creator of this guide is an active classroom Language arts teacher. Many of the activities in this guide have been developed by trial and error from classroom activities. One of the goals for this guide is to provide the reader with real life skills learning through hands-on activities through a variety of learning methods.

The target audience of this novel are students between the ages of 9-13. The author of this guide has used this novel and activities for students that fall into these age brackets. The author utilized this novel with a group of fourth grade advanced readers. This book has been very successful at drawing in the interest of reluctant reading boys and girls of the ages 12 and 13.

The pace of the story is fast with few tangents or sidebars. The author formatted the story to carry a fast pace and maintain the interest of the target audience. The author has enjoyed tremendous feedback from the target audience. Many boys who would normally chose not to read have provided positive feedback on the pace and story flow.

A web site has been developed to further assist the classroom teachers and literacy instructors. The web site was designed to be user friendly with down-loadable activities and well as to provide printable mini-posters for the students. The author has also provided an online survey in order to receive feedback from teachers and students. The website also hosts information about other books written by this author as well as an email address for students and instructors to send notes and letters to the author.

Thank you so very much for your interest and support of your students. The author of *The Santa Cruz Mountain Boys*, himself was a reluctant reader. If it weren't for a few wonderful teachers, this author would have fallen through the cracks.

The Santa Cruz Mountain Boys
Book One: The Bookmark

PLOT SUMMARY

The setting is in the Santa Cruz Mountains of northern California, near the San Francisco Bay Area. The main character, Ricky Cardenez, is a Mexican-American teen that has grown up longing for the father that he never had the chance to know. Ricky's father, Ricardo (Rico) Cardenez Sr., was a firefighter who lost his life saving others during the worst flood of the century in Redwood City, California.

Ricky has many characteristics similar to his fathers. Helping others is one of his characteristics, which places him in peril with the middle school bullies. Ricky comes to the defense of the middle school weakling, which becomes the cause for Ricky himself to be bullied at school. Ricky endures the harassment by choosing not to fight. Though he is quite capable of defending himself, he honors a promise to his mother to not fight. She urged him to "smart" his way out of bad situations, just the way that his father did.

Just when he is at his wits end, being harassed by the bullies more than ever, a mysterious old man appears. The man gives Ricky a bookmark that was fashioned from an angel's feather. It's not just any ordinary bookmark though, it's living. The man, named Redhorse, tells Ricky that the bookmark has magical powers that will allow him to adventure in and become a part of any book where the bookmark is placed.

Ricky accepts the gift from the old man. At first, Ricky doesn't believe the old man's claim of the bookmark's power, until he accidentally uses the bookmark to go into his California History book. Startled by the first bookmark adventure, Ricky convinces his friend Jordi (the middle school weakling), to go on an adventure with him. Ricky partly hopes to have fun with the bookmark, but also wants another witness to the bookmark's power.

Ricky and Jordi travel into a couple different books together. After traveling before school one morning, Ricky and Jordi show up late for school. On their way into school, they are intercepted by the bullies. Yet again, Bo, the leader of the bullies, threatens to throw Ricky and Jordi in the school dumpster. Ricky's tolerance for the

bullying is about to peak. He manages to avoid fighting one more time, but his resistance is weakening. Ricky and Jordi leave the bullies and head into school.

Ricky and Jordi complete the school day without any further incidences. After school, they meet by the lockers and walk outside the school building on their way home. As they begin their walk home, the bullies approach them. The bullies continue the harassment from earlier, yet meet resistance from both Ricky and Jordi. Upon threatening to throw Ricky and his bag in his locker, Jordi tells the bullies about the bookmark. Naturally the bullies don't believe Jordi's story of a magic bookmark. To the annoyance of Ricky, Jordi presses on in telling the bullies about the bookmark. Ricky reminds Jordi that Redhorse warned of foolishness with the bookmark. Jordi challenges the bullies to take an adventure with the bookmark and they accept. Ricky resists until Bo calls him a mamma's boy. Ricky agrees to let one of them adventure with he and Jordi. They choose to adventure into the story of Jack and the Beanstalk. Zach, one of the bullies, does not follow Ricky's directions and gets captured by the giant.

Ricky sends Jordi out of the adventure to find help in order to rescue Zach. Bo goes back in the story with Jordi, and together with Ricky; they rescue Zach as a team. While rescuing Zach though, Ricky gets captured by the giant. Bo and Zach try to leave Ricky behind until Jordi reminds Bo that Ricky sacrificed himself for Bo's friend. What Jordi says, triggers something in Bo's memory to go back with Jordi and rescue Ricky.

After going back in to rescue Ricky, Bo single-handedly takes on the giant in order to rescue Ricky. After they leave the adventure, Ricky asks Bo why he came back to help. Bo tells Jordi and Ricky, that it was because a brave firefighter once sacrificed himself to save Bo and his mom during the great Redwood City flood. This is the moment where Ricky, Jordi, and Bo realize that it was actually Ricky's father who died while saving Bo.

Bo's shock and remorse for mistreating Ricky and Jordi is overflowing. Together, they come up with the idea to use Rico's old journal in order for Ricky to meet him. Ricky decides that if he can't ever have his dad, he could at least use the bookmark to meet his father. They attempt to go into his journal and meet Rico as a seven year old on a playground at school. They are struck by the realization that they can use the bookmark for endeavors like this.

Soon after, Ricky gets the notion to use the bookmark and journal to go back in time to the Redwood City flood and rescue Rico. They plan to glue the newspaper article about the flood and Rico's death into the journal. They hope that once the article is a permanent fixture in the journal, it can be used to adventure into the flood.

Ricky, Jordi, and Bo team up for one last adventure. After acquiring and preparing the new rescue equipment, they go back in time to the flood. At the flood, Ricky offers to let Rico use the special equipment. Rico is too focused on the rescue to take the time to put on new equipment. As Rico bounds into the floodwaters only repeating history, Ricky puts the rescue equipment on and goes after him. Rico delivers the mother and newborn to the helicopter's rescue basket in the nick of time. Soon after, he and Ricky are again sent into the floodwaters as the car washes away. Together they hang on to Ricky's rescue line until they are dragged by truck out of the waters.

After leaving the flood adventure, Ricky, Jordi, and Bo wait at home to find out if they re-wrote history and saved Rico in the flood. As their curiosity peaked, the three boys saw Rico's truck pull into the driveway. Ricky dashed out to meet the truck and hug the father he always wanted to know.

Strap on your seatbelt and follow the excitement with Ricky, Jordi, and Bo, the modern day knights known as the Santa Cruz Mountain Boys!

Chapter Summaries

1) **The Ultimate Sacrifice:** A firefighter Rico Cardenez dies while attempting to rescue a pregnant lady in the worst flood in California History. Rico's wife was pregnant with their first child(a boy). She is forced to raise the child alone.

2) **Sticks and Stones:** Rico's son, Ricky, has very similar traits of his father. He gets hassled by the bullies in school after coming to the rescue of the school weakling. The harassment increases until Ricky is almost at his wits end. Though tired and frustrated from the bullying, Ricky loyalty to his friend remains true.

3) **Jordi:** Jordi is the school weakling. A nice kid lacking in stature who finds himself on the receiving end of bullying. Jordi and Ricky discuss the bullying situation and how they wish it could all go away. Ricky tells Jordi that he is on the verge of giving in to the bullies and fighting them. Jordi thanks Ricky for the daily price of friendship in protecting him. Ricky reminds Jordi that real friends look out for each other. Ricky and Jordi both jest about how they wish they could magically make the bullying go away.

As their teacher enters the classroom, they prepare for a history presentation on an everyday hero. Jordi convinces Ricky that they should both volunteer to be the first to perform the presentation.

On his way to the front of the class, Bo(who is also in the same history class with Ricky and Jordi) shouts out and is removed from class.

4) **The Santa Cruz Mountain Boys:** The Santa Cruz Mountain Boys is the self appointed nickname of the gang of bullies in school. Bo, Zach, and Matt, are the guys that spend the bulk of their school days to skipping class, stirring up trouble, and harassing Ricky and Jordi.

5) **Everyday Heroes:** The bulk of this chapter focuses on the details presented by the history teacher Mrs. Sinton on the everyday hero's presentations. She ask's for volunteers and is please to announce that Ricky wrote the best paper in the class. Ricky now feel very self-conscious and sinks deep in his seat as Mrs. Sinton raves about his project.

6) **Joe Vierra's Raiders:** Jordi presents his report to the class on a military hero. The hero's name is Joe Vierra, the leader of an Army unit that fought in Europe in World War II. Joe Vierra and his unit, nicknamed the Santa Cruz Mountain Boys defeated the Nazi's in the small town of Pizzutti, Italy.

7) **The Forgotten Hero:** Ricky's presentation in on the Forgotten Hero, the firefighter's that have died in the line of duty. He places pictures of various firefighters

on the board to be view by other students during his presentation. He never mentions that his father is a forgotten hero.

Upon completion of his presentation, Mrs. Sinton is moved to tears and leads a class discussion on the forgotten hero's. She halts the presentations and assigns the students to write a letter to a Forgotten Hero.

As class lets out, Ricky and Jordi walk out of the room and Jordi is tripped by Bo. Ricky steps on Bo's hand and prepare's for a fight until Mrs. Sinton steps in and sends Bo to the office.

8) **Ricky's Letter:** After school, Ricky goes to the library to complete his homework. He writes a letter to his forgotten hero, his father. As he writes the letter, he finally comes to terms with the fact that his father did the right thing. Ricky mentions in the letter that he now understands that father didn't really choose the lady in the flood over him. Ricky thanks his father for being a hero that he is so proud of.

9) **The Helper:** After writing the letter, Ricky begins the long lonely walk home. As he gets outside and turns the corner at the back of the school, he is suddenly tripped off his feet by Bo and the SCMB(Santa Cruz Mountain Boys).

Ricky is dazed and stunned from hitting his head on the dumpster. He helplessly watches as Bo throws his backpack in the dumpster. A mysterious stranger appears which scares off the bullies. The man helps Ricky get to his feet and pulls Ricky's bag out of the dumpster. He takes Ricky inside the school and gives Ricky an eagle feather that he claims is magic. He explains to Ricky that when used properly, the feather can be used as a magic bookmark. The bookmark can allow him to travel into any book where the bookmark is placed.

Ricky politely thanks the old man for the bookmark and leaves the school headed toward his home. As Ricky walks home, he thinks about the old man and the bookmark and wonders if the whole story could actually be true.

10) **The Angel of Peace:** Redhorse tells Ricky the story of the feather's origin. He tells Ricky that the feather was given to a peasant over a thousand years ago in the lands now known as Mexico. An angel of peace visited in the middle of the night. The angel gave the peasant stern warnings about a threat to him and his villagers. The angel left the feather as a sign of his visit and promised that if the peasant heeded the warnings and followed his guidance, no harm would come to him.

11) **The Carrier:** After telling Ricky about the living angel's feather, Redhorse presents Ricky with it. Redhorse transfers the feather to Ricky and pronounces him to be the 'carrier'. Redhorse tells Ricky that he is now the carrier of the feather's power.

Redhorse explains to Ricky that the angel promised to protect the peasant and honor his descendants for generations to come. He expresses to Ricky that the feather has been passed down through generations for over a thousand years. Ricky is skeptical and confused at the thought of holding a thousand year old living feather in his hand that was given to his ancestors from an angel of God. He tells Redhorse thank you and goes home.

12) **The adventure begins:** After Ricky gets home from school he does his normal routine of chores and then homework. While sitting down to do his homework, Ricky's curiosity about the mysterious feather grows. Ricky stifles his curiosity about the feather until his dog Gunner sniffs and scratches and becomes overwhelmed with fear of the feather. Ricky is surprised at his dog's fear and takes the bookmark out of the bag and lays it on top of his history book. Feeling ridiculously silly about the whole situation, Ricky begins to mock the old Native American man and the feather. He places the feather in the middle of his history book, and closes it. He ceremoniously holds the book with the feather in the air and shouts that he wants to become part of the book.

The next thing Ricky realizes is that he was knocked off of his feet by an explosion. The explosion was caused by a Nazi hand grenade that was meant for an American Soldier named Joe Vierra. Joe helps Ricky get up off the floor and introduces himself. Ricky suddenly realizes that he is actually in his California History book. He is now living what he has read about in history class. As Ricky and Joe introduce themselves, they are suddenly discovered and taken prisoner by a German soldier. The German soldier does not speak English, which helps Joe recruit Ricky's assistance in pushing the button on a fuse that is connected to explosives meant to destroy a Nazi weapons bunker.

Ricky discretely pushes the button on the switch and blows up the bunker. Joe informs Ricky that they need to quickly get out of the area before the whole place explodes. Joe sneaks back to his troops while Ricky leaves in the opposite direction. Ricky decides to exit the situation and follow Redhorse's advice in trying to return home. Ricky instantly exits the book and finds himself back home sitting on his backyard deck. He is spooked by the experience and throw the book and bookmark away from his reach.

13) **How do you know when you're crazy?** After discovering that the magic bookmark is real, Ricky hops on his bike headed to school to find Redhorse. When Ricky reached the school he was greeted by locked doors and nobody around. He would have to wait until school the next day to talk with Redhorse.

The shock of the whole experience leads Ricky to wonder if he is losing his mind. He wonders how a magic bookmark could be real? He considers telling the authorities about the bookmark but realizes that noone would likely believe him. He figures that the person most likely to believe him would be his friend Jordi. Ricky decides that Jordi would be the only person he would share the secret with.

Though he is content with talking to Jordi about it the next day, Ricky still wonders if he might be losing his mind.

During dinner, Ricky makes a flippant comment to his mother. He asks her if people see any signs before they go crazy. Her natural motherly instinct is to question if he is using drugs or is involved in something illegal. Ricky assures his mother that he is okay, but something strange happened at school and it is making him question his sanity. His mother asks him what is bothering him, but he pleads with her not to make him tell.

She assures him that she trusts him enough to let her know if he needs her help. He promises to let her know if he gets in a situation that he can't handle.

Ricky can't stop thinking about the bookmark and all of the possibilities that it may present. He has a hard time sleeping that night because of all the excitement with the bookmark.

14) **Day two and Jordi:** Though he has a bad nights sleep, Ricky leaves for school earlier than normal. He goes to Jordi's house and wakes Jordi up by telling the story of the magic bookmark. He reminds Jordi that they asked for some type of magic and that now they have it. Jordi rolls over and tries to go back to sleep. Jordi tells Ricky to stop trying to fool him, but is assured that Ricky is telling the truth.

Ricky begs Jordi to get dressed so they can use the magic bookmark on an adventure. After giving up on sleep, Jordi tells Ricky to go downstairs and wait while Jordi gets ready for school. After coming downstairs, Ricky has Jordi choose the story out of a childrens' fairy tale collection. Feeling insulted by being offered a childrens story, Jordi chooses the Three Pigs. Ricky explains the process of adventuring as Jordi listens in a mocking way.

The two boys count to three and open their eyes. Jordi is shocked to learn that he is looking a talking pig in the eyes. He is dazed and confused as he sees the big bad wolf stalking the home.

Somewhat freaked out at the situation, Jordi requests that they go back home. Ricky obliges him and they exit the book. Shocked and excited at the opportunity, Jordi asks Ricky if they can go on one more adventure. Ricky hesitates at first, but soon is convinced to make one more adventure.

15) **THE MAX BROADWATER EXPERIENCE:** The Max Broadwater Experience is a biography about a teenage boys experience with racism and discrimination in the 1940's. Though Ricky agreed to adventure one more time, he is very concerned about getting stuck in one of the adventures. He reminds Jordi that he doesn't know if there is a time limit on the bookmark. He tries to convince Jordi that they should just wait until they can talk to Redhorse about it.

Jordi expresses to Ricky that he really wants to meet Max Broadwater and help him at a crucial period in his life. The two boys travel back to the 1940's where some white kids are playing ball. The ball field was a white's only field. No matter how much Max pleaded with them to let him play ball they wouldn't let him until Jordi negotiated a secret bet. Jordi bet the white kids one hundred dollars that he, Ricky, and Max would beat the team of seven white kids in the game. After making the bet with the biggest of the white kids, Jordi told Ricky about the game and bet.

Ricky was furious with Jordi as they still didn't know if there was a time limit on the bookmark adventures. Ricky was still afraid of getting stuck in a book. Jordi convinced Ricky that they needed to help Max in his time of need. Jordi reminded Ricky that he had always made the right decision to help someone in his or her time of need.

Ricky finally agrees to play the ball game with hesitation. Max, Ricky, and Jordi won the game 7-2. Max played an incredible game and made three single-handed triple plays. Max and one of the white kids named Jackson Dean met after the game.

Jackson apologized for not letting Max play and promised that it would never happen again. They grow up to be lifelong friends and actually make it to the major leagues.

After the game, Ricky and Jordi head back home. When they get there, Ricky affirms to Jordi that they did the right thing in helping Max. Ricky tells Jordi that it took a lot of guts to stand firm in his beliefs.

16) **Late for school:** After returning from their adventure, Ricky and Jordi sit awed and dazed at their experience. Though they are late for school, they are tired from the early morning ball game with Max Broadwater.

They decide to find Redhorse and get more information about the bookmark. In particular, they want to know if there are any special conditions that go along with the bookmark.

On their approach to school they are met by Bo and the bullies. The bullies threaten to throw Ricky and Jordi in the dumpster. Ricky stands his ground. Bo tells Ricky that they will get him in the dumpsters after school.

17) **Redhorse and the bookmark:** Ricky and Jordi sneak around school while trying to be seen by teachers or faculty because they are extremely late to school. When they find Redhorse, Ricky finally gets to clear up some of the concerns about the bookmark. Redhorse tells Ricky that there are no time limits on the bookmark and that anyone can adventure with Ricky. Redhorse does warn them again about the type of adventure they take. He also warns them to be careful whom they take on their adventures. Redhorse again warns Ricky about dark hearts, meaning people who could make the adventure dangerous by their behavior. The boys head to class after meeting with Redhorse. Before they split up, Jordi reminds Ricky to not let the bookmark out of his sight.

18) **The challenge:** After school, the boys again meet up with and are challenged by Bo and the bullies. Bo postures himself to try throwing Ricky and his bag in the dumpster. Jordi, who is feeling pumped up from the Max Broadwater Experience gets in Bo's face and threatens to throw Bo and his buddies in the dumpster if they touch Ricky's backpack. At first, Bo is taken aback at Jordi's newfound courage. Jordi and Ricky stand their ground.

Bo's curiosity about something valuable being in the backpack grows. Jordi tells Bo that Ricky has something in his backpack that would make them run home screaming like little babies. Bo continues to push Jordi's buttons until Jordi finally tells them that Ricky has a magic bookmark.

Bo doesn't believe Jordi, but Jordi persists in telling the bullies about the bookmark. Ricky grows frustrated at Jordi for being so irresponsible. Ricky reminds Jordi of the warnings given by Redhorse. Jordi is passed the point of no return. His years of frustration and bullying surface all at once. Jordi challenges Bo and the bullies to adventure with the magic bookmark.

Ricky's frustration develops into anger at Jordi. Bo senses Ricky's frustration and begins pushing Ricky's buttons. Ricky's anger causes him to give in and allow one person to adventure with he and Jordi. Bo selects Zach to adventure. The disbelieving Zach chooses the story of Jack and the Beanstalk to adventure in.

Ricky and Jordi give Zach instructions on how to adventure safely. Zach doesn't adhere to the rules and is captured by the Giant in the story. Though Jordi wants to leave

Zach behind for not following their guidance, Ricky tells Jordi to use the bookmark to get Bo in order for them to rescue Zach.

19) **Teamwork:** Bo returns to the story only to find out that the magic bookmark is real. He is shocked to hear Zach's screams as he is really trapped by the giant. Ricky tells Bo and Jordi that his plan to rescue Zach is based on using the golden egg to hit the giant and cause him to drop Zach. Ricky hopes that some of the tips given him by Max Broadwater will help him make a good connection on the giant's head. After the giant drops Zach, all four boys plan to meet and exit the adventure. Ricky hits the giant well enough, but Zach's ankle gets hurt after the giant drops him. Ricky diverts the giant enough for Zach to get away, but the giant captures Ricky as a result.

Much to his surprise, Jordi, Zach and Bo leave Ricky in the adventure and return to the library. Jordi calls Bo a sissy and reminds Bo that Ricky sacrificed himself for Bo's friend. Something about what Jordi said triggered Bo to go back and help rescue Ricky.

When Bo and Jordi return, Ricky tells them that the giant has him in the kitchen. They have no rescue plan until Bo uses his cigarettes to light the giant's shoes and socks on fire. As the giant's shoes go up in flames, he drops Ricky and they escape.

Ricky thanks Bo for coming back to help him when they get back to the library. Ricky asks Bo why he decided to come back and help. Bo answers by telling Ricky and Jordi how his mom was rescued by a firefighter in the Redwood City flood who sacrificed his life for them. Ricky shocks Bo and Jordi by telling them that the firefighter was his father.

Bo apologizes and begs for Ricky's forgiveness. Ricky forgives Bo and thanks him again for rescuing Ricky.

An awkward moment ensues as the three wonder where they will go from there. Bo apologizes to Jordi and promises to never harass him again. Jordi accepts Bo's apology with some reservation. The three begin to part company when Jordi comments that he is going home to take a nap. Ricky and Bo affirm that they couldn't sleep now if they tried. Jordi makes a flippant comment that if the adventures didn't tire him out, the story of Ricky's dad did. Ricky is suddenly overcome with the notion that he might be able to use the story of his dad to accomplish a lifelong dream of his. Ricky tells the guys that maybe they can use his dad's journal to adventure in and meet Rico. The three race to Ricky's house to get the journal and adventure one more time.

20) **The journal:** When they get to Ricky's house, he finds his dad's life journal. They quickly scan through it to find a page to adventure in. They decide on a page that refers to bullying. They begin the adventure on a playground where two boys were bullying seven-year-old Rico. The boys, Kevin and Tommy were harassing Rico for not speaking English well. Ricky comes to the rescue. He offers for Rico to keep his special baseball cards. He also offers to allow Rico to share the cards with Kevin and Tommy if

they agree to help him with English and not harass him anymore. Rico, Tommy, and Kevin become friends on that playground.

21) **Lifeb ook:** After the adventure on the playground, Ricky realizes that they can bring things out of their adventures as well as leave them in. The golden egg and ball cards give him the notion that maybe he, Jordi, and Bo could return to the flood and actually rescue Rico and change history. He ponders the idea of taking something into the Redwood City flood that would help Rico survive. All three agree to take on jobs for the next adventure. Ricky's task is to meet with Redhorse and find out if they can change history without hurting anyone. Bo has the task of going to the firehouse to learn if there are any new pieces of equipment that they might use to rescue Rico. Jordi's task is to surf the internet and thoroughly research the flood.

22) **The Firehouse:** Bo approaches the firehouse sheepishly and meets with the fire captain. Bo tells the captain that he is doing research for a school report on the great flood. The captain becomes teary eyed and tells Bo the story of the flood. He informs Bo that he was at the flood and lost his best friend, Rico. The captain tells Bo about Rico and how they met on the playground as friends. Bo realizes that the captain is Kevin. The captain tells Bo that they now use a special bracket-pulley during their rescues. He tells Bo that the pulley was used in World War II by some American soldiers. One of the soldiers gave him the pulley after the flood.

23) **Winds of time:** Ricky meets with Redhorse to find out if they could use the bookmark to go back to the flood and rescue Rico. Redhorse informs Ricky that they are in a special window where the winds of time are blowing twice. Ricky again asks if he rescues his father that he won't affect the future too much. Redhorse answers him by telling him that the story of life is much greater than one event.

24) **Making history:** After completing their tasks, the three boys get together at Ricky's house to plan and conduct their next mission. At Ricky's house, Bo tells he and Jordi that the Captain is one of the boys from the playground so long ago. Bo gives Ricky the pulley that the Captain loaned him. He tells Ricky that the Captain said that the pulley would have ensured Rico's survival. Jordi confirms his internet research and agrees that the pulley is the best tool for the rescue. Ricky tells the guys that he spoke with Redhorse and received the go ahead in rescuing his father.

25) **The flood revisited:** The boys return to the flood and are amazed at how powerful the storm actually is. They find Rico and Kevin, as Rico is about to enter the water on his way to rescue the lady in the car. Ricky runs over to Rico and offers the creek pulley. Rico refuses the pulley as he is afraid that there is not enough time to get geared up. He is afraid that the car will wash out before he gets there.

Rico enters the water and is followed by Ricky who is strapped in with the creek pulley. By the time Ricky gets to the car, the baby has already been delivered. Rico is shocked to see Ricky at the car, but uses his assistance to get her and the baby safely out of the car.

As soon as the chopper arrives, Ricky and Rico get the lady and baby safely in the rescue basket. The chopper takes the mother and child away while Ricky and Rico plan the next step. Ricky hooks Rico up to the creek pulley just in time as the car washes out. They are pulled to safety. As soon as they are out of the water, Rico recognizes Ricky as the guy who helped him on the playground many years ago. Rico asks if Ricky is a guardian angel. Ricky promises to explain it to him later, referring to if and when Rico makes it home from the flood. The three boys bid Rico farewell and head back home.

26) **Rico returns:** After the boys return home from the adventure, they sit in awe of the experience. They question each other about what will happen next. They come up with the idea to call the firehouse to see if Rico is there. They are notified that he is no longer there as they see him pull in the driveway at home. Ricky and Rico run to each other and embrace in a never before father/son bear hug. Ricky introduces Rico to Bo and Jordi and explains how they used the bookmark to rescue him. He is confused but accepts their story as they show him the original newspaper clipping of Rico's death in the flood.

27) **Completing the journey:** Excited about having the father that he never knew, Ricky and Rico go to the school to meet up with Redhorse. Ricky wants Redhorse to meet his father and find out what to do with the bookmark. When they get to the building managers office, Redhorse is nowhere to be found. Ricky asks the head building manager where they can find Redhorse. Mr. Scott, the building manager is confused and tells Ricky that he doesn't have an assistant. Perplexed about the situation, Mr. Scott hands Ricky an envelope with Ricky's name on it. Mr. Scott tells Ricky that the envelope was sitting on his desk when he arrived to school.

Ricky and Rico leave the building headed for home. After getting home, Ricky runs to his bedroom and opens the envelope to find a letter from Redhorse. The letter from Redhorse congratulates Ricky on making good choices and helping people. Redhorse also mentions that the Winds of Time continue to blow. Ricky wonders if he can still with the bookmark. Redhorse also confuses Ricky by writing that he is a helper for the great maker.

Upon encouragement from his father, Ricky and Rico plan to bury the feather in a nearby Indian reservation in the coming days.

28) **Changes with the three amigos:** This chapter ties up loose ends. It discusses the changes that each boy experience in their own lives. The change that Ricky experiences is having the father that he always wanted. He and his dad have been spending lots of time together. Partly to make up for lost time, but also to fill Rico in on some of the details that he is still not remembering. Rico's memory continues to be flooded with details from the thirteen years.

Jordi's major life change is to finally be able to enjoy school without the fear of being bullied. He also gets to now enjoy his locker. The principal even allows Jordi to keep a boombox in his locker to make up for lost time. Jordi enjoys the newfound friendship with Bo.

The most significant change for Bo is that he has real, true friends that he can depend on. He is also no longer in search of trouble on a daily basis. Bo confides in

Jordi that he caused so much trouble as a result of anger issues that stemmed from his parents divorce. Bo again apologizes to Jordi for all of the suffering that he caused and promised to cover Jordi's back forevermore. Jordi affirmed to Bo that he can count on Jordi and Ricky through any issues that arise.

Bo wonders hypothetically if the bookmark adventures are truly over. He really enjoys being one of the "good guys" and wants to continue helping people. Jordi also hopes to continue the adventures, but reminds Bo that Ricky and Rico need some time to be father and son for the time being. They decide to wait a couple weeks or so to discuss continuing the adventures with Ricky.

Pre-Reading Activities

- 1) Writing Prompt: Imagine someone gave you a magic bookmark. What book would you choose?
- 2) Vocabulary: 1) gullable 2) wash-out 3) safe zone
- 3) Discussion Questions: Have you ever seen anyone risk their own safety to help another person?
- 4) Have you ever seen someone bullied?
- 5) Have you ever been bullied?
- 6) Why do you think some people are bullies?
- 7) How do people become bullies?
- 8) What are strategies to deal with bullies?

About the Author

G. Hardy was born into an Army family in El Paso, Texas. He spent most of his childhood in a suburb of Washington, D.C., before moving to Morgantown, West Virginia to pursue a business degree with an emphasis in German studies at West Virginia University.

After spending some time on active duty with the United States Army, he moved to Colorado where he earned his Colorado Teachers License and earned a Masters Degree in Education from Regis University.

Hardy currently teaches 6th grade language arts/social studies at Holmes Middle School in Colorado Spring, Colorado. He resides in Colorado Springs with his wife and three children.

“The Santa Cruz Mountain Boys” is the third book written by Gary Hardy. His goal for writing is to provide life lessons with an entertaining format that will teach kids the values of honesty, loyalty, respect, and perseverance.

Vocabulary Activities

- 1) Play I am/ Who is vocabulary game.
- 2) Fill in the blank sentences.
- 3) Words of the Day: Write the words on the board and have students use dictionaries to find the meaning of the words. Have the students share and discuss the meanings.
- 4) Write vocabulary words on the board and have the students write as many synonyms as they can think of.
- 5) Word hunt: Have students look the vocabulary words up in the thesaurus and write down as many as they can within a specified time. Have students share and discuss their results.
- 6) Vocabulary Bee: In addition to spelling each word correctly, the participants must define the words correctly as well.
- 7) Have the students create a word find using the vocabulary words from the story. Puzzles may be duplicated in order to be shared with the entire class.
- 8) Have the students create a crossword puzzle using vocabulary words from the story.
- 9) Word hunt: Divide the class into team and have the students find the vocabulary in the book. Once they find the word, have them identify the location and the definition in context of the story.
- 10) Clue's game: Have a student give clues about a vocabulary word. The student who guesses correctly gets to give the next clue.

Sections

Section 1
Chapters 1-5

Section 2
Chapters 6-10

Section 3
Chapters 11-15

Section 4
Chapters 16-20

Section 5
Chapters 21-25

Section 6
Chapters 26-28

Section 1

Quiz

Chapters 1-5

1) Why was Ricky bullied?_____

2) T or F: Everyday hero's don't always know that they are hero's._____

3) What item did Ricky carry in his pocket for good luck?_____

4) What did Bo and his gang call themselves?_____

5) What happened to Rico during the flood?_____

6) T or F: Jordi carried a briefcase instead of a backpack. Why?_____

7) T or F: Jordi's real name is Nellis Franklin Jordan._____

8) What is a wash-out?_____

8) What happened to Rico's safety line?_____

10) Why did Rico feel that they needed to hurry to the wash-out?_____

Section 1 Writing Activity

Writing Activity:

Imagine that you are a 911 dispatcher. You have just received a call. Write the dialogue from the 911 call.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

Thinking Activity

If you were to retell these chapters to a friend, think about the ten most important events that occurred in these chapters.

- 1) Write them down in a column.
- 2) After listing the events, prioritize them from 1-10 according to which you find the most important.

Have students share and discuss their findings.

Modes of Writing

Descriptive writing activity

- 1) Have the students imagine that they are the firefighter called to the rescued scene. Have them write a descriptive paragraph or two from the perspective of describing the call, the scene, the rescue, the storm.

Persuasive Writing Activity

- 1) Have the students write a few paragraphs convincing fellow students to band together to stand up to bullies.

Integrating Art into Curriculum

1) Drawing:

Have the students draw a picture from what they imagine one scene the chapters would look like. After drawing the pictures, list the characters, setting, and explain the significance of the scene.

2) Role Playing:

Organize the students into small groups. Have them plan, organize, and conduct two-minute skits that demonstrate ways to deal with bullies.

Section 2

Section 2

Quiz

Chapters 6-10

1) T or F: Joe Vierra's Raiders were soldiers in World War II. _____

2) What is the name of the helper? _____

3) Who is the forgotten hero? _____

4) Who did Ricky write the letter to? _____

5) How did Ricky's backpack end up in the dumpster? _____

6) What did the old man give to Ricky? _____

7) How many years has the bookmark been around?(approx) _____

8) What did the angel of peace leave as a sign for the peasant? _____

9) T or F: The holocaust is a historical event in which the Jews were persecuted by the Nazis in Germany. _____

10) Why was Bo not a part of the classroom presentations? _____

Writing Activities

- 1) Discuss the word hero with your students. Have the students explain what it means to be a true hero as compared to what popular culture glamorizes as heroes.

- 2) Have the students list as many heroes (by name if possible) in two minutes. After listing the heroes, have the students choose one and write a thank you letter to that hero. After completing the letters have students share and discuss the similarities and differences between the various heroes chosen.

Thinking Activity

Have students create a reverse quiz. A reverse quiz is a quiz in which the students create and write the quiz questions. The teacher chooses one question from each students quiz during an oral quiz.

Modes of Writing

1) Narrative: Have the students recall the story of Joe Vierra's raiders also known as the Santa Cruz Mountain Boys. Have the students write a historical documentary narrative about the Santa Cruz Mountain Boys.

2) Expository: Have students explain their interpretation of the following lifeskills: Persistence, loyalty, perseverance, patience, kindness.....

Character Traits

Have the students list five characters from the story and list at least four character traits for each.

1)
CHARACTER: _____

DEFINING
TRAITS: _____

2)
CHARACTER: _____

DEFINING
TRAITS: _____

3)
CHARACTER: _____

DEFINING
TRAITS: _____

4)
CHARACTER: _____

DEFINING
TRAITS: _____

5)
CHARACTER: _____

DEFINING
TRAITS: _____

Section 3

Quiz

Chapters 11-15

- 1) T or F: The angel's feather had been passed down for over a thousand years?__
- 2) T or F: Ricky's first reaction to the feather was he thought it was a trick being played on him by someone._____
- 3) What happened when Ricky first put the feather in his history book and mocked the old man?_____
- 4) Write one adjective that describes Ricky and explain why you chose that adjective._____
- 5) Why is the bookmark called a "living bookmark"?_____
- 6) T or F: Joe Vierra's Raiders were also known as the Santa Cruz Mountain Boys._____
- 7) How many adventures did Ricky take by himself?_____
- 8) What book did Ricky take Jordi into, for Jordi's first bookmark adventure?_____
- 9) Who is Max Broadwater?_____
- 10) What bet did Jordi make with the white kids for them to allow Max Broadwater to play ball?_____

Writing Activity

Descriptive Writing

1) Have the students imagine that they are Ricky. Ask them to write a very vivid paragraph about their first experience with the bookmark.

Narrative Writing

2) Have the students imagine that they have been given a magic bookmark. Ask them to create their own chapter about their first adventure.

Thinking Activity

Discuss fact and opinion with your students. Have them list seven facts and seven opinions from chapters 9-12.

Hint: A fact is something that is concrete and can be proven. Example: The car is red.(A car's color can be proven)

Opinion: That car is worthless.(The worth of the car depends on the individual person evaluating it. One person's trash is sometimes another persons treasure.

1) Fact:_____

Opinion:_____

2) Fact:_____

Opinion:_____

3) Fact:_____

Opinion:_____

4) Fact:_____

Opinion:_____

5) Fact:_____

Opinion:_____

6) Fact:_____

Opinion:_____

7) Fact:_____

Opinion:_____

Word Find

- 1) Have the students choose twenty key words from the chapters.
- 2) After choosing the key words from the section, have the students create a word find using the words.

Art Integration

Give the students a piece of paper and have them draw their interpretation of one of Ricky's journal experiences. After completing the picture have the students title it and write a brief description of the scene.

Student Interview

SKITS

Instruct the students to role play in pairs as if one is a news reporter and the other is a character from the story. Have them perform their skits in front of each other.

Section 4

Quiz

Chapters 16-20

- 1) What are the names of the three bullies?_____
- 2) Who told the bullies about the bookmark?_____
- 3) Which bully adventures first?_____
- 4) What happened when Ricky and Jordi took the bully on the adventure?_____
- _____
- 5) What warning did Redhorse heed to Ricky about using the bookmark?_____
- _____
- _____
- 6) What did Redhorse mean when he mentioned foolish hearts?_____
- _____
- 7) What happened to the bully in the adventure?_____
- _____
- _____
- 8) What reason did Ricky give Jordi for not abandoning the bully in the ill-fated adventure?_____
- _____
- 9) What item did Jordi take out of the Jack and the Beanstalk adventure?_____
- _____
- 10) What did Bo do to the giant in order to rescue Ricky in the adventure?_____
- _____
- _____

Writing Activity

NARATIVE WRITING:

- 1) Write a story about your own bookmark adventure.

DIALOGUE AND PERSUASIVE WRITING:

- 2) Write a dialogue about your conversation with a good friend. You are attempting to persuade the friend to believe that you have a magic bookmark.

Thinking Activity

- 1) Discuss racism and segregation with the students. Lead a classroom discussion on how life would be different if segregation existed today.

- 2) Encourage students to think back to the Max Broadwater Experience. Have them create a T-chart listing the similarities and differences between the present and the 1940's.

Crossword Puzzle

Have the students create a crossword puzzle from the words listed below and ten words that they choose from the book.

- 1) Colored
- 2) Segregation
- 3) Broadwater
- 4) Bookmark
- 5) Crop-chopper
- 6) safe-zone
- 7) hooked-up
- 8) patriotic
- 9) Cardenez
- 10) Redhorse

Art Integration into Curriculum

Marketing

Have students design a poster to similar to the kind of posters that they see used in advertising movies. Tell them that they need to design a persuasive poster that will cause kids to want to see the movie.

Social Studies

CURRENT EVENT:

Directions:

Discuss some of the thematic elements that are included in the Santa Cruz Mountain Boys. List the thematic elements that you and the students think of on the board. Have the students look through old magazines and newspaper to find articles or stories that deal with these issues. After choosing the story or article, have the students write a one paragraph summary on it using the who, what, when, where, and how format. After the students write the summary, have them create a list of the similarities and differences between the thematic elements of the book and the article or story they chose.

Section 5

Quiz

Chapters 21-25

1) What does the term lifebook mean?_____

2) T or F: Our life experiences are sometimes referred to as the chapters in our lifebook._____

3) Why did Ricky want to change or re-write Rico's lifebook?_____

4) Who did Bo speak with at the Firehouse?_____

5) What was the significance of the person at the Firehouse?_____

6) What did the firefighter want to flip a quarter at the flood?_____

7) What are the winds of time?_____

8) How do the three boys make history?_____

9) What were Ricky's actions at the flood?_____

10) Who did Rico think that Ricky was after they were rescued at the flood?_____

Writing Activity

Have the students create a booklet with several sheets of paper. Have students create their own journal similar to Rico's with paragraph entries on significant events in their lives.

Timeline

- 1) Have students create a timeline based on ten significant events in the book.
- 2) Have students create a timeline based on significant events in their lives. Have them list at least one event for each year of their life.

Thinking Activity

Discuss the section in the story about the Lifebook. Have the students create a table of contents, title, and the chapters that would be included in their lifebook. After completing the information, have a round table discussion with the class on the various chapter headings that they chose for themselves.

Integrating Arts

Have the students brainstorm what type of cover picture would be most appropriate for their lifebook. After brainstorming, have them complete the cover art for their lifebook. After completing the cover art, have the students write a short persuasive paragraph convincing the teacher why this cover is the best choice available.

Section 6

Quiz

Chapters 26-28

- 1) How did the two journals get mixed up at the flood? _____

- 2) How did Ricky learn that they actually changed history? _____

- 3) Who did Rico say was one of his greatest heroes as a child? _____

- 4) What happened when Ricky and Rico went to the school to thank Redhorse? _____

- 5) What did Redhorse leave for Ricky? _____

- 6) Who did Redhorse say he actually was? _____

- 7) What do you think Redhorse meant by, "Enjoy your breeze from the winds of time?" _____

- 8) What does Ricky decide to do with the feather after returning from the flood? _____

- 9) How did Jordi's life change as a result of the bookmark adventures? _____

- 10) What was the main reason for Bo to vent his anger on Jordi? _____

Writing Activity

Expository Writing

The last chapter in the book discusses Bo's newfound interest in being a "good guy" and helping people. The author leads the reader to believe that the bookmark adventures won't end with rescuing Rico. Guide your students through a discussion based on making inferences and drawing conclusions around that premise. Encourage your students to share what they think the next bookmark adventures will be. Also, remind your students about the hint in the last paragraph of the book. "A picture, a note, and a small jar of pocket change would be the impetus for Bo to convince Ricky to continue the adventures."

After discussing what your students think will happen in the continuing adventures, have them write an expository paragraph or two explaining what they would do if they had a chance to use the bookmark to help people.

Chapter 29

One More Adventure

This image shows a single page of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

Critical Thinking Activity

Lesson in cause and effect

Lead a round table discussion with your students about the effects of helping people with the bookmark. Encourage them to think “out of the box” in regards to what affect they could impose on someone’s life with something such as the bookmark.

Encourage them to think about how they might change someone’s lifebook. In changing or re-arranging someone’s lifebook, who else might be affected by their generosity.

After introducing this activity and discussing it with the students, have them jot down brainstorm notes of all of the effect that they would impart on people.

Art Integration into Curriculum

Provide students with an envelope and two blank sheets of paper. Explain to them that they will be creating a “magic feather”. They are to draw what they picture the feather would look like and cut it out. They may fringe the feather with scissors as well to make them more realistic.

After designing and cutting out the feather, have the students use the other sheet of paper to write a note to the person that they would like to use the feather to help. Have the students explain the feather’s power and how to use it.

After completing the note, have the students seal the feather in the envelope with the letter and address it.

Chapter Summary

According to Langerman (1990), a literature gap exists. The literature gap is commonly referred to as a “five year void”. It has been identified between the ages of 7 and 12. Research indicates that there is a lack of literary material targeted to that age group. Research provides evidence that the bulk of literary material is broadly focused and is somewhat gender neutral.

The author of this applied research project conducted informal research to identify the literary desires of the target audience. Middle school boys identified to the researcher that the literature that interests them needs to have action, adventure, relevance, believable characters, and everyday themes.

The manuscript was specifically designed to match the stated needs of the target audience. It is very narrowly focused to the specific age group of middle school boys and provides material that is relevant to their everyday lives.

The following documents are included at the end of this thesis:

- Appendix A-Spelling List
- Appendix B-Vocabulary List
- Appendix C-Character Analysis
- Appendix D-Silent Reading Record
- Appendix E-Venn Diagram: Similarities and Differences
- Appendix F-Cause and Effect
- Appendix G-Teacher Survey
- Appendix H-Student Survey
- Appendix I-Answer Key to section Quizzes

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

Middle school boys want and need to be entertained. Whether in sporting activities, video games, or socializing with friends, active stimuli maintain their attention. Interaction is a key component in maintaining the attention of an adolescent boy.

Reading is no different than any other experience for this group of boys. The researcher in this project learned that boys will follow-through with any activity if their interest can be maintained. If boys are presented with quality, entertaining material, they will read. According to the research gathered by this author, boys respond positively to action, adventure, and suspense-filled literature. If they are the true target market for the reading material, boys respond positively to literature.

In the world of literature, middle school boys are an underserved target audience. A literature gap has been identified between the ages of 7 and 12 (Langerman, 1990). One chief complaint from middle school boys is that there is nothing interesting to read. This author gathered informal research that supported the complaint of adolescent boys. The creator of this project reviewed books in bookstores and libraries and found that most young adult literature and literature for children primarily targets girls and younger audiences.

This project was designed to meet the needs of middle school boys and literacy instructors. A manuscript and free teacher's resource guide were created to support teachers in meeting the students needs. The researcher created a manuscript targeted to

middle school boys. The manuscript was designed to present action, adventure, and suspense that would capture and maintain the attention of this target audience and stimulate a new reading interest in them.

In order to better serve literacy instructors in supporting their students, a free web site was also created. The purpose of the web site was to provide additional materials as well as to enable instructors and students to contact the author with comments, feedback, and suggestions for additional learning activities. The web site also provides free downloadable pictures and mini-posters for students to print.

The author of this project also created a teacher and student survey in order to solicit feedback. The surveys are included on the web site as well as an appendix in the teachers guide. Student opinions and suggestions are requested. Students are also encouraged to email the author for information relative to future novels.

Solving the Original Problem

The creation of a new novel targeted to middle school boys does not entirely solve the original problem, but it does support the theory that reading material targeted to this audience is lacking. When presented with this reading opportunity, the target audience responded with resounding positive feedback and requested more material in the same genre. This manuscript addresses the chief complaint of this target audience. It provides quality, entertaining reading and nurtures the interest of middle school boys.

Assessment of the project

The researcher provided the novel to several teachers. The teachers read the novel and reviewed the teacher's guide for potential use. The teachers that were selected instruct boys that fall into the age range of the literature gap. The teachers were provided with a ten question survey that solicits feedback on the merits as well as potential limitations of the project.

Students were also provided a survey that was formatted to their specific literary desires and needs. The survey consisted of twenty questions. The age range of the students to complete the survey was between the ages of 10 and 13. For the purposes of efficacy, students were encouraged by the creator of the manuscript to provide an honest assessment of their reading experience. The author expressed to the students that their honesty would help the author meet the future needs of future students.

Students and teachers, provided valuable information to the researcher. The evaluators shared with the researcher what they considered to be the strengths and the limitations of this literary project. They also provided recommendations relative to improving the teacher's guide.

Strengths

The researchers literary project was very engaging to the students across the spectrum of readers. The feedback from the target audience was that the novel was "cool" and "one of the best books I've ever read."

One of the main goals for this project was to engage the target audience with material that was suited to their interest. According to the feedback from the target audience, that goal was achieved with resounding success. Several of the students in the target audience requested additional reading material by the author. Most of the students that read the novel were very adamant in encouraging the author to write a sequel to the first novel. The students expressed that they developed rapport with the characters and wanted to learn more of the characters and what might happen next.

Additional feedback from the students and evaluators expressed that the real life scenarios, feelings and experiences provided purposeful learning opportunities for the readers. Students found that they could relate their own life experiences with that of the characters.

Limitations

Although the novel and teacher's guide partially achieved the results that were desired, the project is only one small step in closing the gap discussed earlier. One such literary work can at best open doors for additional works that will be of interest to the target audience.

Another limitation that was discovered is the author's limited ability to market the novel. Currently the reading audience is limited to readers in the local area. The author of this project is working on publishing the material in order to reach greater numbers of readers within the target audience. Ideas such as e-books and traditional hard-copy publishing are being considered.

Another limitation that was unexpected is the fact that so many of the evaluators and students were disappointed to learn that there are currently no additional books available. Most readers were curious to learn what might happen to the characters in a future novel. Students and evaluators expressed to the author that the characters became real to them.

Unexpected Results

One significant unexpected result was learning that female middle school students enjoyed the novel as much as the boys. The author learned that male and female readers were engaged in different ways. The boys tended to be engaged by the action, adventure, and suspense, whereas, the female readers were engaged at a more emotional level. The poignant aspects of the novel as well as the developing relationships between the main characters engaged female readers.

Recommendations for Future Study/Improvements

This project was developed for several reasons: to engage middle school boys and reluctant readers in literature that is relevant to them, to provide the reading audience with literature that is free from profanity or crude insinuations, and to provide literature that will help close the literature gap for the target audience. Additional novels or sequels should be written by the author in order to meet the requests of the students and evaluators. Future research should be conducted in order to verify that a literature gap exists and, if the target audience's needs are fully being met.

Summary

Teachers and students alike were in agreement on the merits of this project. Literacy teachers believe that the more quality literature for the target audience, must be available. Not all teachers agreed that there was indeed a literature gap, but they were all in agreement that the project met the needs of the readers.

Students were not concerned about a literacy gap as much as having something enjoyable to read. The feedback from students was very positive. The students expressed that the characters seemed real, believable, and people with whom that they would like to be friends. Students also expressed that the novel had themes and topics that are relevant to their lives.

This project presents material that is written specifically for middle school boys. The author researched bookstores and libraries to identify literary elements that the target audience finds engaging. The thematic elements, characters, and character development were narrowly designed to focus on the age level and life experience of the target audience. The author specifically used everyday situations that the audience as a whole deals with on a regular basis. This provided relevance to the readers as well as useful references in how to effectively deal with challenges in their day-to-day lives.

Research shows, though highly debated on both sides that there is a literature gap for boys between the ages of 7-12 years (Langerman, 1990). One novel certainly cannot close the gap; it can, however verify the needs of the target audience are not being addressed through use of appropriate meaningful literature. Much more literature must be produced in order to fully accommodate the needs of the audience. Therein, the

challenge with which we are presented deals directly with creating literature that is rich in content and character, literature that invites the reader to engage in reflective thought and application.

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APPENDIX A

Spelling List

Spelling List

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| 1) Epiphany | 21) Bookmark |
| 2) Racism | 22) Ceremonious |
| 3) Segregation | 23) Nazi |
| 4) Rescue | 24) Synagogue |
| 5) Helicopter | 25) Briefcase |
| 6) Pregnant | 26) Apologized |
| 7) Firefighter | 27) Ignorance |
| 8) Mumbling | 28) Carrier |
| 9) Enveloped | 29) Pulley |
| 10) Obnoxious | 30) Chopper |
| 11) Grimaced | |
| 12) Holocaust | |
| 13) Forgotten | |
| 14) Messenger | |
| 15) Peasant | |
| 16) Ancestor | |
| 17) Descendant | |
| 18) Gimmick | |
| 19) Adventure | |
| 20) Booby-trap | |

APPENDIX B

Vocabulary Words

Vocabulary Words

- 1) Holocaust
- 2) Segregation
- 3) Wash-out
- 4) Safe-zone
- 5) Prejudice
- 6) Ignorance
- 7) Epiphany
- 8) Visualize
- 9) Teamwork
- 10) Loyalty
- 11) Bullying
- 12) Colored
- 13) Inner-City
- 14) Frustration
- 15) Sentimental
- 16) Foolish
- 17) Messenger
- 18) Mortality
- 19) Dispatch
- 20) haphazard

APPENDIX C
Character Analysis

Character Analysis

NAME: _____

CHARACTER: _____

1) I imagine the character's physical appearance to be: _____

2) The character displays personality traits such as: (Hint: story character usually demonstrate or provide personality trait evidence such as behavior, words, thoughts, actions, feelings.)

3) Does the character take on a major role in the story? _____

4) What is the character's role in the story? _____

5) What is the major problem or challenge that this character experiences in the story? _____

6) How is the character's problem resolved? _____

7) How does problem resolution affect this character? _____

8) What does this character accomplish as a result of the problem resolution? _____

APPENDIX D
Silent Reading Record

APPENDIX E

Venn Diagram

Venn Diagram

Please use the Venn diagram below to distinguish similarities and differences between yourself and a character in the book.

Use the Venn Diagram box below to identify the similarities and differences between yourself and a character in the book.

Name of character: _____

<u>Similarities</u>	<u>Differences</u>

APPENDIX F

Cause & Effect

Cause & Effect

Please use the space below to complete the examples of cause and effect from the story. After completing the examples below, create three of your own examples of cause and effect.

1) When Jordi and Bo were attempting to rescue Ricky, Bo put lit cigarettes in the giant's socks.

Cause: _____

Effect: _____

2) In the original flood scene, Rico goes into the flood without being "hooked up" with the lifeline.

Cause: _____

Effect: _____

3)
Example: _____

Cause: _____

Effect: _____

4)
Example: _____

Cause: _____

Effect: _____

APPENDIX G

Teacher Survey

Teacher Survey

1) Is The Santa Cruz Mountain Boys a novel that you believe middle school boys would be drawn to reading?

Why? _____

2) Do you believe that you can incorporate this book and teacher's guide in your classroom? _____

3) What thematic elements did you encounter while reading this book? _____

4) What are the strengths of this book and teacher's guide? _____

5) Are there any limitations in this book? If yes, please explain. _____

6) Do you believe that a free web site with down-loadable materials would be an asset for teachers in using this book as a literary unit? _____

7) What recommendations do you have for improving this novel and teacher's guide? _____

8) Do you believe that students would like to utilize a web site on the Santa Cruz Mountain Boys if free pictures, mini-posters, and contact with the author were available to them?

APPENDIX H

The Santa Cruz Mountain Boys Student Survey

The Santa Cruz Mountain Boys Student Survey

1) How was the pace of the book?(steady, slow at first...)_____

2) What did you like about the book?_____

3) If you had a favorite part, what was it and why?_____

4) What type of cover illustration would you recommend for the book?_____

5) If you could change anything about the book, what would it be?_____

6) How does this book compare to other books you've read? Better? Worse? Same?
Etc._____

7) Would you recommend this book to a friend? Why_____

8) What type of audience do you think is best suited for this book?_____

9) What life lessons or life skills can be learned from this book? Why?_____

10) What type of illustrations do you think would make this book more interesting?_____

11) Would you have any interest in reading more books in this series?_____

12) Could you relate to any of the characters in the book? Do you have similar traits or experiences?_____

13) My favorite character in the book is_____

14) One funny memory from the book is_____

15) Was there any part of the book that had an unexpected twist?_____

16) The most memorable part of the book for me is_____

17) My favorite character and I share similar traits. They are_____

18) If I could use a magic bookmark, the book I would adventure in would be_____

19) Why would you choose this book?_____

20) The Santa Cruz Mountain Boys was better or worse than I expected? Please explain_

APPENDIX I

Answer Key to Section Quizzes

Answer Key to Section Quizzes

Section 1: Answers vary: 1) Ricky defends the school weakling in confronting the bullies. 2) True 3) A lucky rabbits foot 4) The Santa Cruz Mountain Boys 5) He drowned after rescuing a pregnant lady and her baby. 6) True-It was the only thing that protected his school stuff. 7) True 8) An area that has been flooded or overrun with water. 9) Ricky gave the safety line to the pregnant lady. 10) Rico thought that the lady's car would wash away.

Section 2: Answers vary: 1) True 2) Redhorse 3) Firefighters and police officers who died in the line of duty. 4) His father, Rico. 5) The bullies tripped him and threw the backpack in the dumpster. 6) A living bookmark, An angel's feather, A magic bookmark. 7) One thousand years. 8) An angel's feather 9) True 10) He was kicked out of class for being disruptive.

Section 3: Answers vary: 1) True 2) True 3) He unexpectedly became a part of his history book. He went into his history book. 4) Adjectives vary: honest, loyal, kind etc... 5) It was called a living bookmark because when it is used the person or persons actually get to live the book. 6) True 7) Ricky took one adventure by himself. 8) *The Three Little Pigs* 9) Max Broadwater is the black kid from Chicago who Ricky and Jordi played ball with in the 1940's adventure. 10) Jordi bet the white kids \$100.00 that he, Ricky, and Max would beat the seven white kids in a pick-up game.

Section 4: Answers vary: 1) Bo, Matt, and Zach 2) Jordi told the bullies about the bookmark 3) Zach adventures first 4) Zach went to the wrong place. He visualized something different than what Ricky instructed him to. Zach was captured by the giant. 5) Redhorse warned Ricky to not use the bookmark for selfishness and greed. 6) Foolish hearts was Redhorse's description of people using the bookmark for the wrong purposes. Haphazard and wreckless adventures is what Redhorse meant. 7) The bully was captured by the giant. 8) He told Jordi that he couldn't abandon Zach because his dad didn't abandon people when all was at stake. 9) Jordi brought the golden egg out of the adventure. 10) Bo placed lit cigarettes in the giant's socks and shoes. The giant's socks caught on fire and he dropped Ricky.

Section 5: Answers vary: 1) The term lifebook refers to a person's life story. The unwritten book of someone's life. 2) True 3) Ricky wanted to change history and actually rescue Rico in the flood. 4) Bo spoke with the fire captain whose name is Kevin O' Malley. 5) Kevin was Rico's partner in the flood. Kevin was also one of the bullies

on the playground when Ricky, Jordi, and Bo adventure into Rico's journal. 6) They usually flipped a quarter to see who had to perform the rescue. 7) The winds of time is what Redhorse refers to when he tells Ricky that he can use the bookmark to go back in time and rescue his father. 8) The three boys make history by going back in time to the flood and rescue Rico. 9) Ricky unsuccessfully tried to get Rico to use the new rescue line. Rico was in too much of a hurry and entered the water with only one ill-fated line. Ricky ran upstream and leaped into the water. He got to the car and assisted Rico in the rescue. Ricky gave Rico a rescue line in the 'nick of time' as the car washed out. They were pulled ashore by Kevin. 10) Rico thought or wondered if Ricky was some sort of guardian angel.

Section 6: Answers vary: 1) Jordi placed the journal in Rico's truck. He didn't realize that he picked up Rico's journal by mistake. 2) He called the firehouse and was told by Kevin that Rico was on his way home. Ricky saw Rico's truck pull in the driveway as Kevin gave him the news. 3) Max Broadwater 4) Redhorse wasn't there. The building manager told them that he had never heard of a man named Redhorse or had an assistant manager. 5) Redhorse left an envelope/letter on the building manager's desk with Ricky's name on it. 6) Redhorse wrote to Ricky that he was actually a helper for the great maker. Ricky wondered if this meant some type of an angel. 7) Opinions will vary: Redhorse was encouraging Ricky to enjoy his new life experience with his father. 8) Ricky and Rico decide to retire the feather until they receive word from Redhorse on what to do with it. 9) Jordi's life changed drastically. He was safe at school, not bullied anymore, got to use his locker, and had two new best friends. 10) Bo vented his anger on Jordi because he was frustrated at his parents' separation and divorce. Bullying was the only aspect of his life that he controlled.