

Chapter 3

Pirate Mountain Treasure

by Rich

Build family traditions.

Drip . . . drip . . . drip . . . fell beads of perspiration from the fat cheeks of the two young boys and little girl marching up a gentle canyon slope. On this hot July day, the towering pines seemed to reach for the sky, and the sun bathed the young children as they meandered after their father.

They followed a roughly cut dirt path that wasn't quite well worn enough to keep dandelions and sprigs of grass from attempting to overtake the cleared space. A spring running alongside the trail beckoned the three with its coolness, but they were not distracted.

"March, march, march, march, march, march, march, march."

The words echoed through the small canyon as the children swung their arms to the cadence.



"Hi-ho, hi-ho, fiddly fo, a pirate's life, here we go!"

The children were on a mission, which could be seen in their faces. Their eyes were cold and sharp like steel, and you could tell they were marching with purpose.

“March, march, march, march, march, march, march, march.”

“We are brave, we are strong, we will fight evil all day long.”

“March, march, march, march, march, march, march, march.”

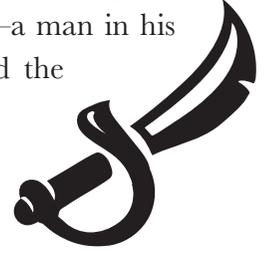
The children were on a mission, which could be seen in their faces. Their eyes were cold and sharp like steel, and you could tell they were marching with purpose. Their father—a man in his

early 30s who bore a sly grin and a shovel—led the cadence. Beads of sweat also slid down his face.

It soon became evident that their destination was a short way ahead, so they pressed on, chanting and marching, although it didn’t make much sense to be singing or telling stories of pirates. The determined father and children were 10,000 feet above sea level, surrounded by quaking aspens and tall pines, with the occasional deer or squirrel darting through the brush. Of course, any animal was usually enough to interrupt the children’s determined marching, which always brought them back to thoughts of pirates.

Whenever they stopped, their dad would say, “Watch out for the pirates!”

The older boy, who was about six, carried a brass chest under his arm. The little girl was carrying a locket half-in and half-out of her pocket. Upon arriving at a meadow, they stopped for some water and licorice. They had finally reached the right spot, and their



The determined father and children were 10,000 feet above sea level, surrounded by quaking aspens and tall pines, with the occasional deer or squirrel darting through the brush.

father proceeded to tell a tale—a scary tale of pirates who had once inhabited this very forest.



About 200 years ago, old Silver Tongue, the great pirate of the Caribbean, became tired of the heat and humidity and decided to take his crew to summer in the mountains. The children didn't know what "summer" meant when used as a verb, but it sounded impressive.

"So," their father said, "this great pirate marched his crew all the way from the ocean up into the mountains, and they found this very spot, right where the three of us stand now, and made this their retreat.

"This is where they buried their treasure, and it still lies in these very woods. As they did with their treasure, so shall we with ours. You see, these are magical woods. If we deposit our treasure here carefully and strategically, then through the winter, the pirates' treasure will magically gather to our treasure."



The little girl's eyes were as big as saucers; she jumped as a deer scurried behind a bush while both boys waited expectantly for Silver Tongue's pirates to emerge holding pistols and cutlasses.

After the story, the children took a string and tied it at the bases of four chosen trees, creating a crisscross. At the center of the X, they dug a hole for their treasure.

Opening the football-sized treasure chest, the father couldn't help but chuckle. He had invited his children to put two or three of their most precious possessions inside. The trove included several Pokémon cards, a princess toy, a sticker from a quarter machine,

"This is where they buried their treasure, and it still lies in these very woods. As they did with their treasure, so shall we with ours."

and an assortment of coins, including a precious buffalo nickel. But the personal favorite of the two boys—and to the disgust of the little girl—was a grasshopper they had caught the day before and wrapped neatly in a plastic bag.

The children watched in wonder as the hole got deeper, each taking a turn using the shovel. The younger boy was invited to secure the lock on the chest. Then they placed the chest in two plastic bags and solemnly delivered it into the earth. The ceremony culminated in the children shoveling dirt over the top, reassembling the sod, and taking down the crude X that marked the hidden spot.

When their work was done, the children sat down on the spot, and their father shared another story, this one about more than mere pirate gold and crazy Silver Tongue the pirate.



He said, “This is a very important spot to me and to you. You see, your mother brought me here to this very meadow and this same exact spot for my birthday lunch when we were falling in love; and here she gave me a wonderful kiss. As a matter of fact, this tiny meadow is where I presented your mother *her* treasure, the sign and token of my love: her engagement ring. You see, this is the place where I proposed to your mother.”

The children’s eyes widened and brightened, not out of the fear of pirates summering in an enchanted forest, but out of calm, out of the sure feeling born out of the deep love their father had for their mother. They felt stable and strong.

But soon the children grew restless, and the father said, “Come on, I have one more treasure to show you.”

They then hopped across the little brook and went to a modest grove of aspens.

After a few minutes of searching, the father found a tree with some words engraved into the bark. As the children got closer, they

put their chubby hands on the carved lettering. The oldest boy, to his great delight, realized what it was.

His father's initials were carved in the tree. Under those was the word "loves," followed by his mother's name.

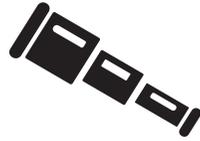
"Children," their dad said, "on that very day, I fell in love with your mother. We came down to this aspen and carved our initials into the tree together. And here, some fifteen years later, the exact tree still grows."

The kids laughed and said, "Sheesh, Dad."

Then with great glory and dignity, the pirate adventure ended as the father and his children marched down the beautiful little canyon (this time not sweating so much, what with gravity on their side). The brook still babbled along their path, the grass was still green and lush, and the flowers still reached for the sun. The kids felt happy, alive, peaceful, vibrant, and full of adventure.

The following year, on an overcast July day with interspersed light and sprinkling rain, their father again threw a shovel over his shoulder, and he and his three children began their march back to the meadow.

"March, march, march, march, march, march, march, march.



"Hi-ho, hi-ho, fiddly fo, a pirate's life is here to go!

"March, march, march, march, march, march, march, march.

"We are brave, we are strong, we will fight evil all day long.

"March, march, march, march, march, march, march, march."

They progressed through the canyon, finally reaching their secret, sacred spot. The oldest boy wrapped some string across the same trees as the year before, and, together with his brother and little sister, dug up their treasure.

His father's initials were carved in the tree. Under those was the word "loves," followed by his mother's name.

The calm and peace the oldest boy gained from this grounding experience was as great as the elation he had felt upon finding his buried treasure.

When they reached the chest, their father leapt forward and shouted, “Quick! Pirates! Hide!”

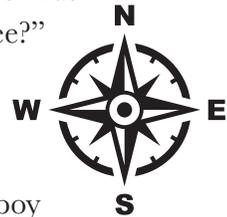
The children dashed for the trees, and the father pulled something from out of his pocket. His children returned eventually, and after soothing their nerves for a bit, he tugged the brass treasure chest out of the ground.

Carefully, they lifted the latch and found true treasure awaiting them. There were strange coins, little jewels, and all sorts of new, small treasures that had appeared, taken from the pirates’ lost horde. The moment evoked magic in every way, and the children jumped and danced with glee.

Then the prized grasshopper flopped out from the jewels. Yes, it was rotten and stinky. At least it hadn’t attracted any other dead grasshoppers.

After separating the bug from their bounty, the kids asked, “Dad, can we please go down and see the tree?”

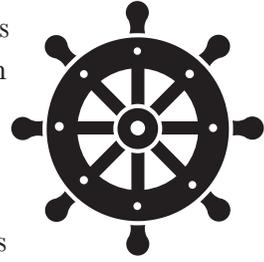
They walked down to the little creek and jumped across it. Once the oldest son found the aspen, he outlined the engraved letters with a careful finger. The calm and peace the oldest boy gained from this grounding experience was as great as the elation he had felt upon finding his buried treasure.



If one analyzes this experience, it’s hard not to laugh. The ocean is some 2,000 miles away. Why would pirates carry their treasure across 2,000 miles of mountains and rivers just to “summer” in an enchanted forest?

But what should be learned is that the father was creating traditions. Amy Griswold, former educator of family life at the University of Illinois Extension, wrote, “Traditions give security to young people, providing a sense of continuity and routine that they

can depend on year after year. Such activities help promote healthy relationships between the generations when they are enjoyed and anticipated by everyone.”



The father was creating stories, and he was creating symbols and grounding points for his children. These treasure-hunting trips became some of the strongest, happiest, and most peaceful memories of these children’s lives and are something they still talk about.

Families become unified and have great joy when they combine stories with beliefs, create symbols (things we can see that remind us of key ways of being), and establish rituals (events or things we do repeatedly that open our minds to new ways of thinking) in their adventures.

I’m sure, at the time, that this father did not consciously plot to hit all three points. It probably just felt right. But this grand adventure created a calm grounding and learning experience for his children that they will always remember.

ALEX'S ACTIONS

I'm not old enough to be able to look back at family traditions and see their value. But I am smart enough to know how much I enjoy the traditions my parents have been creating for me and my brothers since I can remember. And I remember the little ones as well as the big ones, whether it's all sitting down for dinner together (when we're all home), going on an epic hike, or doing something for another family at Christmastime.

Check back with me in a few years, but I think I'll remember lots of these times together when I have kids of my own. And I already know I'll be creating traditions and rituals just for them! What my parents do is a huge part of what connects me to them, and I want to make sure my children feel exactly the same way.

- Build traditions. Whether it's sitting down for dinner, going on hikes, or doing service at Christmastime, traditions create shared memories that tie families together.