

THE MISADVENTURES OF



PETER PAUL PAPPENFUSS

CAMPOREE OF DOOM



BY SETH J. PIERCE



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DEDICATION

To Pathfinders everywhere, those who love the woods and those who get lost in them.

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Thanks to all my contacts within the Pathfinder organization for giving me intel. Thanks to one organization that will remain nameless for its consistent ability to “inspire” me to keep on writing. My Xbox 360 has also provided me with countless mindless diversions on numerous occasions, which at the time may have prevented me from writing, but now I see helped me refocus in order to finish.

Many, many, many, many, many thanks to the Vicodin I am on as I write this, which makes me feel good as I await the root canal scheduled for 11:00 A.M. on Friday. I also appreciate Paramount Pictures for releasing *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* on my birthday—very thoughtful, you guys!

Finally, thanks to all of those who enjoyed *The Day the School Blew Up* enough to spend money for it; and I sincerely hope you enjoy the prequel you now hold in your hands.

OTHER BOOKS BY SETH J. PIERCE

The Day the School Blew Up

Pride & Seek

What We Believe for Teens

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

While this book is inspired by themes and locations from the 2009 camporee, the people and locations have been altered to fit the story. It is also my hope that the theme “Courage to Stand” will stand on its own, no matter what year it is.

Now with that said, it is always the author's privilege to base a work of imagination off of real people or situations. I hope you enjoy this story, even though you won't know all the secret realities behind it.

God bless.

CHAPTER ONE

FUND-RAISING

“And remember, kids, you might enjoy raising money so much, you’ll want to start calling it ‘FUNd-raising!’”

I kept thinking about those words as I waited for the old man in the doorway to make up his mind. “Now let’s see,” he muttered, leaning against the doorframe. “Tell me again, what kinds did you say you had?”

I held up the box of candy bars I had been lugging around for a half hour, and did my best to sound polite as I repeated the list for the third time. “Like I said before, sir, I’ve got Snickers, M&Ms, Peanut M&Ms, and Butterfingers. Which one would you like?”

He rubbed the white stubble on his chin, and I did my best to avoid staring at the white hairs coming out of his ears. “Uh . . . hmm . . . did you say you had one with peanuts?”

“Yes, sir,” I replied, holding up a yellow package of Peanut M&Ms and a Snickers bar.

He waved his hand and shook his head. “No. No good. I’m allergic to peanuts, you see.”

Yeah, well I’m allergic to having my time wasted, I thought.

“Perhaps you’d like one without peanuts then. I have several, such as—”

He waved me off again. I felt my face getting hot and red. How long had I been here? It wasn’t like I was selling insurance policies or vacuum cleaners. Either you want a stinking candy bar or you don’t. I thought about using my own money and buying one just so I could throw it at him. One *with* peanuts.

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“You know, sonny, I think I’ll just pass today. Thank you.” And he ducked back into his home and shut the door.

At least my record was unbroken: zero for five in candy sales for the day.

What a rotten way to spend summer vacation—and all because of the camporee. This International Camporee happens once every five years, and it’s a huge gathering where tens of thousands of Pathfinders come together at one place—Oshkosh, Wisconsin—to work on badges such as archery, swimming, and, my personal favorite, aviation.

My uncle Martin is a pilot, and we usually get to visit him once a year in the spring. He always lets me sit in the copilot seat while he flies. This past spring was the best though, he actually let me taxi around the runway in his small prop plane while he explained all the foot pedals and dials. It was the greatest moment of my life—besides being born.

I’ve wanted to go to the camporee since I heard about it back in December, seven months ago; I’m hoping to get to work on my flying skill and maybe even get a chance to taxi again—or more. However, I’m stuck with two problems.

The first is that it costs a fat hundred and sixty bucks to go. A hundred and sixty bucks that I don’t have. I tried asking my dad, who is the pastor of the First Church in Davenport, Iowa, to hook me up so I could go. He started off on some tangent about responsibility and work ethic, which I finally figured out simply meant that he is as broke as I am. That is where FUNd-raising came in.

During our weekly chapel at school, we were shown a video of a guy who is one of the Pathfinder leaders. He encouraged us all to attend the camporee and then gave several suggestions for raising money. After his talk on fund-raising, he said something that I believe is a lie; he said that fund-raising can be “fun.” I was the first kid to suggest that this was a lie by asking our youth pastor if the Pathfinder leader on the video would be raising money to pay his own way to the camporee. All I got was a silent glare.

Then my best friend, Harley O’Brien, followed up my line of questioning by asking if the guy on the video would be willing to raise money for *us*, since he seemed to think it was so much fun. Our youth pastor fidgeted a bit and told Harley that because of their leadership positions, some leaders had budgets and even wealthy benefactors who paid their way.

When I suggested that we focus on finding a rich benefactor for each of us, I was supported by several other kids, who began suggesting names of church members who we know are loaded. This was quickly squelched, and I was told to wait out in the hall until the meeting was over when I would be “debriefed” on how I was to raise the funds. The result: this big box of candy bars I’ve been enslaved with.

FUND-RAISING

The second problem I have is with Pathfinders itself. Being a Pathfinder is fun because it's similar to Boy Scouts. We go camping, learn cool stuff, and get to carry pocketknives. However, there is one fundamental difference between Boy Scouts and Pathfinders that has proved to be a fatal flaw in my fund-raising efforts. My neighbors have *heard* of Boy Scouts; they don't know what a Pathfinder is.

I made my way to the next house in our subdivision, called Peaceful Glens. It's a nice enough neighborhood, with a good mix of people and even a community pool. However, we just moved in a month ago, and I told my dad that I didn't think it was a good witness to start asking people for money this soon and that if he would just *give* me the money now, I would raise funds next summer. Once again, I got a negative answer.

I made my way to a yellow house with light-blue trim. I marched up to the white door and used the shiny brass knocker. While I waited for a response, I looked around the neighborhood. The sun was shining, and the sky was clear. It was a balmy eighty degrees, and some kids across the street were running through a sprinkler. *Wish I was running through a sprinkler. I'd even settle for my little sister Mary's kiddie pool. Ugh, Mary! That little nuisance. I bet she's just lounging around the air-conditioned house, thinking of ways to make me look stupid.*

My little sister, Mary, will be going into the third grade this fall, and I am still in shock that her second-grade teacher wasn't bright enough to pick up on the fact that Mary is an extraterrestrial—an alien. I seem to be the only one who has noticed this. I mean, wouldn't it strike you as odd, having a kid who *never* makes mistakes? Not ever. Not ever—*ever*. She cleans up after herself, does all her chores without being asked, gets straight A's, has perfect teeth, is always clean, and has read the Bible more times than my dad, I think. It's weird. And while I consider myself to be a normal child—above average, even—next to her, I look like a Neanderthal.

My thoughts were suddenly interrupted by a response from within the yellow house. It was a gravelly voice that sounded snappy and irritated.

"Who is it?"

I groaned out loud. I hate it when people ask this question.

"Uh . . . it's Peter Pappenfuss."

"WHO?" boomed the voice.

"Um . . . I'm with the Pathfinders," I replied, changing tactics.

"The WHAT?" hollered the voice.

"It's like the Boy Scouts and—"

"You're with the Boy Scouts?" said the voice, cutting me off.

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“No!” I shouted back. “It’s LIKE the Boy Scouts, but it’s through my church!”

“You’re a CHURCH?” bellowed the voice. I clenched my fists and took a deep breath.

Yes! I’m a church. The whole congregation is standing outside your door this minute to sell you some candy bars, because we have nothing better to do! Now, open up or we’re coming in!

“Which church?” snapped the voice.

At least I think that’s what it said. I wasn’t sure, because by that point, I was running at a full sprint to the next street just in case the body that went with the voice decided to open the door. But I don’t think it did. For all I know, that lazy person is still yelling at nobody outside his door.

I decided to give fund-raising one more shot before calling it quits. After all, I did have an ace up my sleeve. My dad had told me that if I couldn’t raise the money, I could choose to have my parents and grandparents give me an “early Christmas present” that would cover the remaining money needed for my trip. At the time, forfeiting Christmas presents seemed about as good an idea as stapling my head to the carpet. But by now, I was beginning to think I might have been a bit hasty.

The final house was two stories, white, and had red shutters. The lawn smelled freshly mowed, and the windows sparkled in the summer sun. It looked promising. However, the screaming that I started hearing as I approached the door suggested otherwise.

I knocked three times and said a silent prayer that no one crazy would answer the door. My prayer was apparently unheard because a disheveled woman flung open the door, accompanied by a chorus of wails and yells. She looked to be about the same age as my mom, and she had three children hanging off of her. She was holding a baby who was grabbing at her neck, while twin boys held on to each leg, crying. Her hair looked like it had been styled by a nuclear explosion, and if I had to guess, she hadn’t slept since last summer. She glared at me.

“And what do *you* want?”

I swallowed hard. “J-Just selling candy bars, ma’am—” At that moment, I saw a boy about four years old run, naked and wet, through the doorway and out onto the lawn. The mother roared in rage.

“BERNICE!”

Good grief, how many kids does she have?

“BERNICE! MILTON HAS LEFT THE BATHTUB AND IS OUTSIDE WITH NO CLOTHES ON!”

Seconds later, a girl my age with brown hair and a look that matched her

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mother's, darted out the door. She grabbed Milton, who was nibbling the freshly cut grass, and hauled him back upstairs. The mother then looked hard at me and pretended to smile.

"Now, what did you say your name was?"

"Um, Peter, ma'am."

"Ah, yes, Peter. Well, as you can plainly see, sugar is the *last* thing we need in this house!" And she slammed the door in my face.

That did it. Christmas was coming early this year.

But before resigning myself to go home and relinquish my Christmas presents, I picked up one of the Snickers bars. I gazed at the brown wrapper and turned it over in my hands. I looked up at the house, where through an open upstairs window, I could hear Milton giggling and squealing. I decided that if Milton found grass to be appetizing, he would certainly appreciate the miracle of chocolate, and after all, the open window wasn't that far away.

"Hey, Pete! People must really be in a buying mood if you're back already," said my delusional father when I walked through the front door. He was sitting in his favorite chair on the left in the living room with his nose in the newspaper.

"Oh they're in a mood, alright," I replied, taking off my shoes and making my way to the living room with my box full of candy bars. Mom was just coming out of the kitchen and looked puzzled to see me.

"Why, Peter! What are you doing back so soon?"

"He's already sold out!" exclaimed Dad, putting the paper down with a smile. Then he saw me. Then his smile disappeared. Then I figured I had better declare my intentions, and I made it sound as official as possible.

"On the contrary, dear Father of mine," I began, "I hereby declare in your presence and the presence of your good wife here, otherwise known as Mom, that I, Peter Paul Pappenfuss, am relieving myself of the burden of these candy bars and accepting the offer of an early Christmas present promised to me in order to fund my expedition—on account that the people in Peaceful Glens are anything but peaceful and are quite possibly clinically insane." And then I added, "Amen," so they would know I was finished. Mom responded first.

"Peter, I hardly think that's fair," she said, walking over to me and placing a hand on my shoulder. "You can't judge the entire neighborhood based on a few houses."

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“Aha!” I exclaimed. “So you admit there *are* clinically insane people in this neighborhood. Now it really comes down to a matter of safety. I mean, who knows what kinds of weirdos are out there?” Mom pursed her lips and crossed her arms.

“That’s *not* what I meant, Peter Paul, and you know it. What I *mean* is that there are bound to be people out there who *are* interested in a candy bar. You just need to look a little longer.”

By this time, Dad was out of his chair and proffering advice. “Your mom’s right, Peter. I think you should reconsider and head back out. Come on—you have an hour or so before supper.” Dad gently tried to turn me around and help me toward the door, but my will was made of iron. I dropped the box of candy bars where I stood.

“Peter!” cried Dad. “What’s the matter with you?”

“What’s the matter with *you*?” I replied, crossing my arms. “I was told that I could quit and have an early Christmas present.” Then I went for the jugular. I quoted his own sermon from the previous week. “Weren’t *you* the one who read Matthew five, verse thirty-seven, last week, *Let what you say be simply “Yes” or “No”; anything more than this comes from evil*” (RSV). Then I took his hand gently and looked at his shocked expression. “Dad, I don’t want to be involved in anything evil. So let’s just let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ OK?”

“Y-You actually paid attention last week?” asked Dad incredulously, looking at my mom for help. But she was clearly shocked as well.

“I know sometimes it seems like I’m not listening when I’m playing with Harley or drawing on the offering envelopes, but I am.” A smile spread across Dad’s face, and he was about to say something when the devil showed up—in pigtales.

Mary was standing in the kitchen doorway, holding a freshly dried dish. *What kind of kid does the dishes voluntarily during summer break in good weather?* She wore blue jeans, a white T-shirt, and no expression. Instead, she asked a question with wicked intentions disguised in a cloak of sweetness. “Peter, after church, in the lobby, I thought I heard you ask Gretchen what the sermon had been about because you had trouble following it—or was that Harley?”

Mom and Dad looked at me and raised their eyebrows.

I lowered mine and looked at Mary. “I think that was Harley—and isn’t there some dirt on a dish you could be cleaning?”

Mom sighed and put a hand on my shoulder. “Peter, leave your sister alone; she’s just trying to be helpful. Your father and I are just concerned that you haven’t really tried your hardest and that you’ll regret not being able to open presents at Christmas.”

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“Let me put it this way,” I said, looking at my mom. “If I never have to go door-to-door again this year, then that will be the gift that keeps on giving.”

Dad chuckled a little and shook his head. “Alright, if that’s what you really want, Peter. We did promise you could do this.”

Mary was not so quick to give up. “But, Dad, won’t this stunt Peter’s work ethic? There won’t always be an early Christmas present to help him out of a difficult situation. I don’t want him to grow up to be a lazy bum.”

I scowled. “Just because you entertain yourself with housework and unnatural obedience doesn’t mean I will be a bum. For all I know, you might become a delinquent later on, in spite of your perfect behavior now. You could become some sort of terrorist, and they would have to call me in as a character witness.” Then I leaned in close to her sickeningly sweet little face. “But I wouldn’t give them a good recommendation, would I? Instead I’d reveal the truth—that you’re an alien sent from space to wreak havoc on society and that you spent your childhood under the radar until you were old enough to fulfill your mission.”

“Peter Paul Pappenfuss!” yelled Mom, grabbing my arm. “Don’t speak to your sister that way. Apologize *right now!*”

“I’m sorry for speculating on your bleak future, Mary,” I said.

Dad grumbled, “OK, Peter, you’ve made your point. Now pick up the box of candy and set it in the entryway so I don’t forget to take it back on the way to work tomorrow.” Mary huffed and went back to the kitchen, carrying her dish, with Mom following behind. I picked up the box of candy, and Dad went back his chair and picked up the paper.

“I just can’t believe you didn’t sell a single candy bar, Peter,” he said, turning back to the sports section.

“Incredible, isn’t it?” I replied, setting the box down on the small table in the entryway. But just then, Mom and Mary burst out of the kitchen wild-eyed and shouting so loud that Dad tore his paper from fright.

“Walter! Walter! There is a naked little boy running through people’s backyards!”

“What?” asked Dad bewildered, as he tried to put his paper back together.

“A little boy,” Mary chimed in, frowning her brow, “about three or four years old. He ran through our yard naked, and some older girl was chasing him. They’re in the neighbor’s yard now.”

“What did he look like?” I asked, sensing a feeling of guilt in my stomach.

“Well, short and naked, what else?” said Mom. Then she paused thoughtfully and added, “He also looked like he had some mud or something on his face.”

“Oh,” I said and dug a dollar out of my wallet. My mom looked puzzled.

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“Do you know that boy, Peter?” she asked.

“Yes . . . yes, as a matter of fact, I do,” I said, making my way over to my father. “His name is Milton.” Then I opened my dad’s hand, slapped down the dollar in his palm, and looked into his astonished face. “I guess I did sell one after all.”