



Flight of the Eagle

A novel by

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A Young Reader story for ages 8-10

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FLIGHT OF THE EAGLE
By
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CHAPTER ONE

Adam was quite excited as grandma's car exited from highway 101. He couldn't wait to see some eagles! Now all they had to do was follow signs to the Eagle Watch weekend at Cannington, Nova Scotia.

Driving past the new Big Stop Irving station, his ten-year old eyes almost bugged out. Flapping in the wind was a monster Canadian flag. It must be the largest one in the whole world.

"Didya see that?" his older sister Melanie asked, poking his shoulder. She continued to point out the window, ignoring his quiet "Ouch."

"Don't be such a baby," she said.

“Okay, now it’s my turn. Eagle Watch sign!” Adam shouted. He speared twelve-year old Melanie with his sharpest fingernail.

“That hurt,” his sister, said. “Besides, that’s not what I was talking about, muscle brain. The sign on the edge of the road has a drawing of an eagle.

“It even looks like you,” she teased.

Adam squeezed his right fist tightly. It turned into a battering ram of bone and muscle. One knuckle stuck out, preparing to attack.

It was too much for seven-year old Colin. He was nervous sitting in the middle of two wrestlers. “Gramma ... Grampa. Make them stop.” He usually didn’t say much. Right now he was quite annoyed.

Then Melanie reached over and slammed Adam. A good one landed right between his shoulder blades. “Dork,” her tight-lipped mouth said.

“Did you have to SMUSH me so hard?” Adam gasped.

“Quit it you two,” grandpa said. “If you weren’t so busy having a boxing match you might notice that sign over there. There’s a lot of writing on it.”

“Sorry grandpa. Sorry grandma,” two voices mumbled from the back seat.

Colin rolled his eyes. What a bunch of fakes he thought.

“I really don’t know how sorry you both are,” grandma said. “We could go back home, you know. Now, do you want me to be a nice grandma and slow the car down? So you can read what the sign says.”

Three voices answered quickly, before you could count to three. “Yes! Yes! Yes!” was their statement of truce. No one wanted to go home, back to Truro. Their fun had barely begun.

Mom and dad couldn’t make it today. And the children didn’t want to stay home with a babysitter.

There was a large sign with a picture of an eagle and a printed message. Everyone read, “INFO STOP 9 KM AHEAD.”

“I like the drawing,” grandma said.

“This one actually looks like an eagle,” grandpa answered.

“Is that really what a baldy eagle looks like?” Colin asked. None of the children had ever seen one up close before, except on TV.

Their car hurried across the Cornwallis River Bridge.

Adam and Melanie looked around. “Hmmm...interesting,” they agreed. It was the children’s first trip to this part of the province.

“Most people call this whole area, ‘The Valley,’ “ grandma said. It was almost as if she could read her grandchildren’s minds.

As they drove slowly along the winding road, Adam noticed mounds of hay covered in plastic.

“Not enough room for the hay in the barn,” grandpa volunteered. The see-through-material was held in place with tires scattered loosely on top. An orange-colored Combine machine sat silently in the field.

“It’s waiting patiently for the next crop of wheat to be cut,” Grandma said, smiling in Adam’s direction.

More ‘Eagle Watch’ signs led them past the First Cornwallis United Baptist Church. Another right, then a left as they drove into a small field. An EAGLE INFO box provided more detailed information.

Grandpa picked out a photocopied map of the area. There was also a paper explaining why this weekend was so special. It reminded all tourists coming to see eagles, to also enjoy the scenery. Everyone was encouraged to drive to the ‘Look-Off’ on North Mountain. Glowing words read, “Prepare for a breathtaking view of Minas Basin.”

“Only one map and information sheet left!” grandpa yelled, hurrying back to the warm car. “Must be quite a crowd ahead of us,” he added.

“Yup,” Colin confirmed.

“I wish dad was here to see the eagles,” Adam said. He wanted to see lots and lots today.

“Too bad mom couldn’t be here too,” Melanie said.

A few kilometers later they entered the little village of Sheffield Mills. Long lines of cars were parked on both sides of Middle Dyke Road.

“Someone around here sure knows how to draw,” grandma said. She nodded her approval at the wooden Sheffield Mills sign.

“And paint too,” Melanie piped up. “Look how pretty the colored letters are, grandma.”

“Not as nice as yours Gramma,” Colin boasted.

“Well, thank you,” she answered.

“Hurry up. I just want to see a whole bunch of eagles,” Adam said. He was getting quite impatient from their long ride.

“Me too,” Colin said. “A whole bunch.”

“You mean flocks?” Grandpa corrected.

“You know what I mean,” Adam said shrugging his shoulders. He hated to be teased, or corrected. He flicked strands of dark hair from across his forehead. His brow furrowed into a frown.

Ahead of them, the little village was surrounded by land, flat as a tabletop. Hills stared from the distance, and frosty fields greeted the new arrivals. They turned onto the Kennedy property as suggested from their Info Map.

After parking the car alongside ten or twelve others the family noticed a bare looking tree. It was similar to one from a picture in the brochure. Except this one was totally stripped of all bark.

“The Eagle Tree!” everyone shouted, like a chorus on TV.

Adam turned his head as someone nearby spoke up.

“It is at that,” a man said, poking his head from the next car. “If this is your first visit, you’re in for a treat.” He kindly pointed out a good spot for the family to watch for eagles.

CHAPTER TWO

Adam could barely hide his disappointment. They were finally here in Sheffield Mills. So where were the eagles?

They should be hanging all over the branches belonging to that lonesome looking Eagle tree. That's where the newspaper said they were supposed to be.

Without bark and leaves the oak tree looked alone and forgotten. A January wind whipped across Adam's face. Good thing he had on his winter cap, with furry earflaps.

He pressed grandpa's binoculars tightly against his eye sockets. His lenses should be able to spot some kind of flying images. Anything would do. But, there was nothing to see.

The story grandma read yesterday couldn't have lied. It said up to 200 eagles could be seen during this Eagle Watch weekend.

Maybe it was just a science fiction story, Adam wondered. Or it could be a neat way to get tourists to visit and spend money in this little village. He knew he had to be careful with his overactive imagination.

How could he brag to his friends about all the eagles he saw? But that would be lying. No sense grumbling about it.

Taking his right glove off, Adam began chewing on his thumbnail. It helped him think.

"Hungry?" is what dad usually said. Then he would point to his own fingers and pretend to gobble them up. It almost made Adam gross out. Mom was clearer with her message. She simply scrunched up her face and said, "Please, not that again."

Not being here, both couldn't get upset. They had to go to Truro to see about dad's new job. His father was quite excited about getting the position of General Manager at Staples Office Supplies.

Moving here from Ontario wasn't quite as thrilling for Adam and Melanie. Leaving good friends behind was more than painful.

Colin didn't seem to mind though. He knew how to make friends anywhere. *It must be easier when you're a little kid*, Adam thought.

Finally, a few months ago it had sunk in. “We’re moving to Nova Scotia!” was the new family song. “Where grandma and grandpa live!!” they had shouted. That was the only good part at the time.

Right now grandma, grandpa, Melanie and Colin shivered beside him in the wind. They kept watching to see if he would shout out any success.

“My turn ‘shrimp,’ ” Melanie mumbled, grabbing at the binoculars.

“This must be the coldest day in the whole year,” Adam whined, handing them over. He couldn’t wait to grow taller, so he wouldn’t always have to look up at his sister. It was hard on his neck.

That’s what they called him at school, “Shrimp.”

“Now-Now,” grandma Esther usually said. Or else, she would cluck her tongue at any negative thinking. This time she didn’t do either. Her scrunched up eyes and scowling face did all the talking.

CHAPTER THREE

They had left Truro at exactly 9 AM. The newspaper story said to be here early in order to watch the eagles eat from food stations. Area farmers placed leftover chickens out for feeding around 10 AM.

It was now fifteen minutes past. And the eagle tree that was supposed to be full of eagles didn't even have one visitor.

Adam wondered why they were in such a big rush to get there. There was nothing to see.

“Time to get up,” grandma said earlier this morning. The words came the exact moment a yoke of sunshine warmed Adam’s eyelids.

He was always proud of the fact he didn’t need an alarm clock to wake up. Especially to be going on such an exciting trip. Perhaps dozens of them were waiting, just for him. One of his main indoor hobbies was reading about animals, and birds. And eagles!

The newspaper read that eagles in Sheffield Mills could be viewed up. Really close, but in safe range. And he knew they wouldn’t lie. Would they?

“Hurry up,” grandpa had called from the hallway. “Or else we’ll never get to see those eagles, chum.”

“They’re Bald Eagles grandpa,” Melanie piped up, from her room this morning. Everyone said she had ears that could hear through steel doors. Adam knew she was quite smart, and nosey too.

“Sure...sure.” Aren’t all eagles around here bald?” Grandpa teased.

“Only mature adults like you,” Melanie giggled.

“That’s okay, ugly,” Adam piped up, coming to grandpa’s assistance. Besides, he took every opportunity to poke fun at his sister.

“Okay...okay. I can take a joke. Now come on, let’s get going,” grandpa said.

“Besides, a bald eagle has white fur on its head. Maybe I should put in an order for some.”

Everyone laughed, except Adam. He didn't want anyone making fun of grandpa, nor his eagles.

"I'm not bald, just mature," grandpa added.

"Immature bald eagles aren't bald. They also have lighter color in their wing linings. And a shorter tail," Melanie said matter-of-factly.

"Where did you learn all this? Grandma asked.

"Adam told me," Melanie said proudly. "He knows a lot about eagles."

"I bet it has something to do with that project he did," said grandma.

"Whatever," Melanie answered.

"Eagles look alike to me," grandpa said. "But I do enjoy watching them. That's why we want this to be a very special trip."

"For goodness sake," grandma said. "Let's get going. Last night I said we should get to bed early. Now look at the time."

Adam was surprised how quickly the night had slipped by. It was like a shadow, which blocked out well laid plans.

Dressing for the day, then gobbling up breakfast were busy activities. And when finished it was Adam who led the charge down the front steps. After all, he was the fastest runner in his school age group.

One hundred and twenty kilometers later, they arrived at the Kennedy farm in Sheffield Mills.

CHAPTER FOUR

Adam's binoculars were almost glued to his eyes. Yet, the eagle tree remained bare as an icicle.

He carefully viewed every inch of the tree. He checked for a hidden head or a folded wing, anything. Perhaps there was a feather caught in the elbow of a branch. Sadly, there was nothing.

“Grandma,” Adam whined. “Where are they?”

“Hi there,” an approaching man said. “I couldn’t help overhearing. Don’t be discouraged. The eagles are spread all over. If you scan that strand of trees at the edge of the field, you can see a large nest. Don’t be disappointed if they take their time coming around this spot...”

“But we drove a long way from Truro to see them,” Adam interrupted.

The man placed a finger on his lips to gain Adam’s attention. “About half an hour ago there were about a dozen eagles flying right overhead,” he whispered.

“Really!” Adam exclaimed.

“Yes,” the man continued. “Seven actually landed in that eagle tree. I know It’s kind of worn and chewed right now. But they frequently use it as a resting place.”

When the man said, “worn and chewed,” Adam thought about his fingernails. One of these days he planned to listen to grandma and grandpa’s words. “Aren’t you tired of us always reminding you,” they keep saying.

“Grandma! Come here, hurry up!” Adam and Melanie shouted together. “This man told us eagles were right over there! In the eagle tree!”

“Show me! Show me!” Colin piped up.

“Yes. They may even come back. But right now the brisk wind keeps them moving around,” the stranger said.

The man was right. Windy gusts kept hammering them. Adam had a hard time seeing properly. His hot breath kept misting his binocular lenses. He patiently scanned the sky.

“They love to soar,” the man said. “They ride the thermals as high as they can. It allows them to move upwards, as if shot from a cannon. Then they glide downwards with their massive wings.”

“My name is Larry,” Adam’s grandfather said, as he joined the group. “You already met my wife, Esther. These are my grandchildren, Melanie and Colin. You’ve already been chatting with Adam. They’re from London, Ontario. Right now they’re living with us in Glenholme. At least until their new home is built.”

“Welcome to Nova Scotia, children! I’m from Yarmouth myself. Just call me, Chuck,” their new friend said.

“Ok, Chuck. Have you come here often?” Grandma asked, joining the conversation.

“Been here three times already. Usually there are more people, but it must be too cold for them today. I see your young ones are properly dressed.”

“Well, as a matter of fact they’re used to the outdoors. And when you like to do things...”

“We’re tough,” Melanie said quickly.

“Yup,” Colin added.

“Shush,” grandpa said. “We took them hiking around the province several times already. They’ve been to Peggy’s Cove and the Cabot Trail.”

“Yah. That was neat,” Colin said. “Hey mister, can I use your telescope?”

“Don’t interrupt, Colin. It’s not polite.” Grandpa continued to listen to Chuck.

“Then, this weather shouldn’t bother you too much. Take a walk around the corner in that direction,” he said, pointing. “I’m going there myself. That’s why I can’t lend you my telescope, Colin.”

“Sounds like a good spot. Honey? Kids? Let’s check it out. We can leave the car. Might see some sky movement, since there isn’t much happening here.”

“Come on grandma,” Adam said. “Let’s go.” He strutted like a soldier as he led them around the streets of Sheffield Mills. Frequently everyone halted and looked up at the sky.

Craning their necks, heads made little circles of movement. From a distance it looked like they were doing exercises. Faces continued to arch upwards, eyes searching for flying eagles.

“This is discouraging,” Adam said. Dejected, he sat down on the curb.

“Hey!” a nearby man shouted. “There’s a recreation hall not far away. If you’re hungry, there’s pancakes and sausages,” he said. “And give you a chance to warm up.”

Adam and his family already had a good breakfast. So there was no need to spend money on already full tummies.

“You should go then head upstairs,” the man said. “There’s all kinds of crafts, home baking. And videos on eagles...”

“Eagles” was the magic word. And Adam was on full alert. “Let’s go grandpa!” he yelled. Suddenly the boy was re-energized.

The building was just a block away. Cars were lined up on both sides of the street and the parking lot was full.

But they clamored through the doorway anyway.

CHAPTER FIVE

“Sure smells good!” the grandchildren shouted, passing a long lineup in the downstairs doorway.

“Hint. Hint.” Grandma said with a smile as she followed her husband upstairs.

“Come on kids,” Grandpa challenged. “Race you.”

Three sets of sneakers almost knocked their grandmother down as they thundered past.

One lady said, “You want to see a real treasure of activity upstairs.”

Now they entered a large room with a variety of display tables. Pictures, models and even drawings of eagles were placed on tables and walls. Adam almost expected someone to come by with a pet eagle on a leash.

The children rushed around checking out all displays. Of course, an assortment of home baked items easily caught their eye.

This is where Adam, the cookie monster had a little visit. Besides stamp collecting, he and grandpa had a sweet tooth to satisfy. And a search began for peanut butter cookies, grandpa’s favorite treat.

But something else in a corner of the room caught Adam’s eye. A colorful video on eagles was being shown! He was really excited as he sat down and listened intently.

Eyebrows were raised and lips puckered up in concentration.

The TV speaker said clearly and distinctly, “Eagles and ravens get along together. Even though no one understands why.”

Colin joined Melanie visiting tables in the opposite end of the large room. This gave Adam a chance to be alone at the video.

Eyes bulging, he watched close-ups of eagles eating chickens. They easily tore carcasses apart using their sharp talons and curved beaks.

“Farmers in this area specialize in raising pigs and chickens,” the TV moderator said. “They originally set up food stations in this area twenty years ago. Since then the size of eagle flocks have grown much larger.”

Adam soaked up this new information. He was astonished to learn eagles came mostly from Cape Breton. And remembered the island from their recent trip with his grandparents.

The Canso Strait Bridge linked it to the mainland. It was an enjoyable ride of almost 200 kilometers from Truro.

“We’ll come back another time,” grandma had promised. “And visit Baddeck. Did you know that Alexander Graham Bell also invented the light bulb? There’s even a museum in his honor.”

Adam rejoined his brother and sister after the video was completed.

“So much to see,” Melanie said to Adam.

“Yup,” Colin agreed.

They were amazed how realistic taxidermists were able to portray eagles on perches. Their large feet and wingspans were “cool.” It was a word used as they moved around the room.

Their eyes feasted on everything.

Adam was like a sponge soaking up every speck of information about eagles. When he looked at his watch, he noticed time racing along. “Grandma...Grandpa? Okay if I go around, one more time?”

Grandma’s quick smile was all that was needed. Then Adam was off making the rounds for another half hour.

He watched a second video. It was fascinating seeing a raven pluck at an eagle’s tail feathers. This distracted the larger bird while another raven seized the eagle’s lunch.

The eagle didn’t seem to mind this little game.

However, when another eagle tried the same trick, it turned into a talon and beak-shoving match.

Melanie always wondered why Adam waved his arms around when he was excited. Now she knew he must be part eagle, she smiled.

Other bits of video news reached Adam’s ears.

“Eagles are symbols of power and courage,” the TV announcer said. “That’s why the bald eagle is the national emblem of the United States.”

Adam was surprised to learn about their strength, easily carrying victims to their nest. Using a keen sense of vision, eagles were easily able to capture their prey. Fish, rodents, snakes and even rabbits provided a tasty diet.

This video is a really neat, Adam thought. Now he could hardly wait to get outside and see some eagles in action.

CHAPTER SIX

Children and adults could hardly believe how quickly the afternoon sped by. Adam saw only one eagle heading away from them.

It was being chased by what looked like a raven. They both flew up, down and around like two children playing tag.

“It’s the same as I saw on the video,” Adam said, looking intently through his binoculars. Now he knew for certain eagles and ravens were true friends. He had seen it with his very own eyes.

Imagine being friends with a majestic bald eagle. The thought sent shivers of excitement down Adam’s back.

Suddenly, It was ‘stop and use the washroom time’, at a nearby garage station. This was followed by a visit to the variety store for treats.

“A few munchies for the trip home,” grandpa said.

“But, it’s still early,” Adam pouted. “How come we’re going already? We hardly saw anything,” he whined.

Grandma and grandpa didn’t seem to hear him. At least they pretended not to, and left Adam mumbling to himself.

The trip home was not something Adam looked forward to. All this way and they hardly saw any eagles. You really couldn’t count one as anything extraordinary. He was quite disappointed.

His chocolate bar seemed to lodge in his throat. And his feet began to sweat in his winter boots.

“Cheer up,” Melanie said, feeling sorry for her brother’s sadness. “We did see a whole bunch of seagulls.”

Adam figured Sis was teasing him. “We came to see eagles!” he shouted.

Being so busy feeling down he didn’t realize their return route was a little different. Melanie also missed sly smiles from her grandparent’s faces. Colin didn’t notice any changes either.

He was too busy drinking his apple juice.

They drove through Cannington village. Then traveled on a traffic-free section of highway alongside the Annapolis River. Houses were mostly wood with various colors and newly shingled roofs.

The children sat quietly in the back seat, absorbed in their thoughts.

A few kilometers later the car slowed down at a sign that read, “KINGSPORT- by the Sea.”

Both grandparents spoke in whispers, as if sharing a secret.

Adam was curious. “What’s up, grandpa?” he inquired.

“Oh by some dumb old river,” Melanie said. “Grandma? When are we going to finally get home?” she asked.

“Yah,” Colin mumbled sleepily in the warm car.

“It’s just a different way home. Please settle down back there,” grandpa said seriously. He tried to keep a chuckle from his voice.

As the car slowed once again, each child wondered aloud, “Why are we stopping?” This slow driving and stopping had lulled them into a sleepy state.

Now they were alert, glancing out the window. The children saw what looked like a huge flock of crows, across the river.

“Are those all seagulls?” Melanie asked. “They’re circling something on the ground. Maybe some animal died.”

“Road kill!” Colin shouted.

Adam wasn’t interested. Who cared whether those were crows or seagulls, anyway? He came here to see eagles.

One time on the shores of Economy village, he observed sea gulls thick as flies. They almost scared the clams he was trying to dig out during low tide.

Besides, “flying poop” birds as Adam liked to call them, messed up the shoreline. How could anyone even have a picnic with them around?

“Grandpa...Grandma. Let’s go,” he said.

“Patience Adam. Here, take these,” grandpa said handing over the binoculars. “Go on sport, get out and take a closer look. Check across the river, high up.”

“It’s freezing out,” Adam moaned. He was finally nice and warm, but he knew he should humor grandpa. Sometimes the older man could get so stubborn. Adam did love him so much though. And ditto for Grandma.

“BRRR, you’re right. Quick, close the door!” Melanie shouted.

“Yah,” Colin added. “Hurry up,” he said, putting his coat back on.

Adam zipped his jacket all the way to his neck. After pulling his cap tightly on his head he stepped into the cold wind. Woolen gloves made it awkward to raise the “binoculars” in the direction grandpa had pointed to.

“They look like...no...not sea gulls,” he said slowly as he adjusted the lenses. ”Maybe just crows or ravens. Or...whatever. There’re too far away. Time to go,” he said dejectedly, then turned and opened the car door.

“Check again Adam,” grandpa encouraged. “One more time, okay?”

CHAPTER SEVEN

At that precise moment Adam sensed something behind him. A sudden movement made him duck down. The huge bird swooped closely over his head and headed towards the river.

Adam barely caught a glimpse of the eagle, as he gulped mouthfuls of air. Giving a few shakes of its eight-foot wide wingspan, the eagle disappeared straight up into the sky.

“Grandpa! Grandma! Everyone!! An eagle! A bald headed eagle flew right over my head. Look! It’s way up there!”

Family members raced to open windows. Then gazed anxiously in the direction of his pointing. All they could see were seagulls and what looked like ravens flying in all directions.

It was as if various flocks had gathered for a picnic. Or even their preparing to launch an attack on a school of fish in the river.

Adam swung his binoculars in a sweep across the horizon. The wind that seemed so cold before now simply brushed against his cheeks. It was no more bothersome than a pesky mosquito.

“Here comes another flock of something,” he said to himself. “Hard to see, though. They’re so many flying close together. Probably more crows or ravens.”

He spoke loud enough so his voice could enter the partially opened car windows. Adam’s words were more like announcements, keeping the family up to date on his observations.

Melanie noticed smiles begin to spread on her grandparent’s faces.

Colin’s nose pressed tightly against the window. He was fascinated by his brother’s excitement. Adam was like a ballet dancer, spinning and turning as he searched every inch of the sky.

Grandpa turned to his wife, whispering loud enough so Melanie and Colin could hear. “I met an old friend at the recreation hall we left. He said we should come here...”

Adam wasn't interested in paying attention to any conversation from the car. His eyes were too busy growing large as saucers. The beat of his heart quickened. He knew what was quickly flying straight towards him.

They were like a bunch of runaway trains rushing in his direction.

"Eagles!" he shouted. "Holy cow, an army of them! Look Melanie. This is awesome. Colin...Look!"

"Wow," Melanie said, lowering her window, the cold no longer a bother.

"Hotdog," Colin said, slapping his hands together. Then he opened the car door and joined his brother.

In a few moments everyone was outside, sharing the excitement.

The eagles were so close no one needed binoculars. The family gathered around Adam, who jumped up and down like a jack-in-a box. He kept twirling his arms. And his mouth had a hard time trying to form words.

"Hey, give me those binoculars before you drop them," grandpa said laughingly.

"Look! LOOK!" was all Adam could say.

His enthusiasm stirred them all. And everyone joined him jumping around, shouting, "LOOK! LOOK!"

Their movements did not bother the eagles. A dozen of them now soared overhead, suddenly taking off straight up into the sky. Like shooting arrows, they disappeared into the clouds.

And, just as quickly descended as falling bungee jumpers towards the surface of the river.

A shuffle of wings and they were off again, sweeping away in several directions. As if they were part of an acrobatic high-flying exhibition.

Bald headed eagles flew singly and in pairs trying to out-perform each other.

They danced like kites across the sky with only a brief stretching of wings. These magnificent birds rode the wind like skateboarders. They floated like maple leaves in autumn, drifting from branch to branch. Then shot up again, as if launched by a geyser.

Somehow they knew their audience was thrilled from head to toe with their daring antics. Adults and children couldn't stop laughing and slapping each other on backs and shoulders.

This was certainly a special family treat. Now the children were really glad they moved to Nova Scotia!

Adam was pleased as a clam at high tide. His sad thoughts about leaving for home a while ago now a distant memory. Instead, he was wrestling with a new feeling. This one was quite different.

He was all choked up. In fact, he was so happy he felt like crying.

Emotions building up inside his chest were strange, yet good at the same time. "This is really cool," he said over and over. "Man oh man, this is so neat. Grandma? Eh, grandpa?"

“It sure is grandson,” they answered enjoying the glow on his face. They came and stood beside him.

Melanie was pleased for her brother. “You finally got to see a whole stack of eagles,” she said.

Colin was really happy, too.

Right then and there Adam made a promise. “I’ll never forget everything I saw today.”

He watched the eagle flock moving on, heading somewhere else. One seemed to linger, then turned towards him.

“Oh, please come back. Just one more time,” Adam said out loud.

The eagle gave a rapid flap of its wings and made a beeline for the boy. It allowed Adam a chance to memorize every exciting detail of his new hobby. He was definitely going to learn everything he could on his now favorite wildlife.

The boy’s eyes moved across each of the feathery spread of wings. He scanned its full length, from protruding tail feathers to the tip of an open beak. Its dark eyes burned into his memory, like pools of energy.

The male eagle’s shriek of freedom caused a parade of eerie chills to race up and down Adam’s spine. The huge bird seemed to understand this little boy was a friend.

With a mighty sweep of layered feathers the eagle caught the rising wind. And the magnificent bald eagle was sent speeding back to his family. Adam followed every movement with his binoculars.

It headed in the direction of forest silhouettes on the far river shore.

Suddenly, the image was gone.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Adam couldn't wait to share his weekend news. But, on Monday morning his school chums weren't very excited about eagle stories.

"You should've seen the fantastic sights I saw," Adam kept saying. He had never seen eagles in Ontario. And here, well...they seemed in plentiful supply.

"That's the problem," his best friend Paul said at recess. "They're flying around all the time here. So why say, 'Ooh-la-la' every time we spot one?"

"But they're different," Adam answered. "I mean, I saw them up really close. They weren't just dots in the sky. They did tricks, and...I was almost close enough to touch one."

"Tricks, huh? Like bungee jumping for fish? Paul asked in a mocking tone. "Give me a break," he said, then headed back at the ring of the school bell.

"You don't understand," Adam called after his departing friend. "They were awesome. The way they danced in the sky. It was beautiful," he whispered.

Adam knew everyone was staring.

Some might think he was weird or something. Comments about him began before his grandparents took him on their "eagle watch" trip to Sheffield Mills. It wasn't his fault the teacher said nice things about his eagle project last month.

He deserved it. Especially after all the research he had done.

When he brought home a 1st Place red ribbon, everyone was proud.

"You did it," grandma said, giving him a motherly hug.

"Great work, son," dad added. "I didn't think you had it in you."

“Copycat,” Melanie said with a smile. She had won in the same category several years before.

“Did you win money?” Colin had asked.

“NOOO. You don’t win money for that,” Adam answered.

“Just glory,” mom and dad said with pride.

When Paul realized Adam was serious about eagles, they became good friends. And he asked his parents if Adam could come to see their eagle nest. It was on their ten-acre property beside Economy River.

“This is better than eating chocolate ice cream,” Adam said. The nest was massive.

“It’s much larger than when my mom and dad first brought me,” Paul said.

The nest was about nine feet across and five feet high. Some branches were three feet long. Paul said the inside was lined with green foliage.

“I got that information at the library,” he said.

“So you do research on eagles too,” Adam said quickly. It was neat to see how the nest snuggled into the crook of a huge spruce. Massive branches spread out as two thick fingers. One kept brushing against the side of a sheer cliff.

“Their location is really cool,” he said.

Unknown to both boys, a huge male bald eagle was observing them. He was on his own eagle tree perch a little further down the valley. Piercing eyes could detect the slightest movement even from that distance.

Adam learned much about eagles, from his friendship with Paul. But right now he could see two young eagles poking heads from the nest.

He wished he had the courage to climb up and look inside. Maybe even pat one of them. Now that would be the story of a lifetime. Just thinking about it gave him goose bumps.

Eagles had become Adam's special bird of the forest. And Paul's family property was his favorite eagle-watching place.

Mother eagle observed them carefully. And sensed the boys would never harm her babies.

After a period of time, Adam became a familiar figure to the eagles. He was easy to see, with his yellow backpack slung over his shoulders.

He wished his brother and sister would come and see these sights.

"I don't like the bugs," Melanie answered. Colin preferred to stay home and play with his friends.

"Are you coming, Adam?" intruded into his thoughts. It meant the end of another trip in the woods with his friend. A supper of baked beans and Johnnycake was waiting at Paul's home.

Adam wished he could watch the eagle nest longer. But reluctantly followed his friend. "Race you back!" was a hearty challenge no boy could resist. Their parents were waiting by the road at five o'clock as promised.

"Did you have fun, boys?" they asked.

“YESSS!” returned as one voice. It was nice being trusted to spend a few hours by the river. The boys were of the same age, and responsible enough to be left alone for a few hours.

After that hearty run Adam was glad it was supertime. He didn’t mind when Paul won the race.

There was always the next time.

CHAPTER NINE

By now Adam's name was on everyone's lips at school. When he first arrived as "the new boy" last September, he had to prove himself.

Stories of his weekend's adventure had made the rounds. He had finally gained a place within the circles of conversation.

Except his new Honor Roll included a nickname. "Hey, "Eagle-boy," was first used with chuckles. Then it became just another name. To be honest, Adam rather liked it.

Others were jealous of his newfound status. And they made sure he knew it. Those who called him "Birdie" or "Bird-brain" intended to be nasty. There was a bit of jealousy against this Ontario kid who had moved here.

At first the serious teasing bothered him. "Mom? Dad? Why are they calling me those names?" he asked.

"You'll get over it," dad said.

"When they grow more mature they'll stop being so silly," mom added.

"Everyone at school gets called some kind of name," Grandma Esther added. "Even nasty ones like "Birdie-brain," she smiled.

"So, what do you think Colin? Everyone has an opinion. What's yours?" Dad asked.

Colin didn't have anything to say right away. But he did think about it while lying in bed. And the next morning at breakfast, he gave his opinion.

"Tell them about your eagle collection," Colin said.

Dad spilled his coffee.

Grandma and grandpa laughed loudly.

The others were unable to say a word. Colin's suggestion was the best advice everyone had heard on the subject of bullying.

"Great idea!" Adam shouted. "Grandma? OK if I invite some of my friends over after school?"

"Sure, Adam."

"Okay with us," mom and dad joined in.

Breakfast was soon finished and everyone prepared to head off in different directions. Mom had to go shopping. Grandma needed to do some baking. And dad was anxious to review his store plans.

Grandpa planned to stay home and read.

"Colin? I'll walk you to school, OK?" Adam said shyly. "Dad doesn't have to drive you, today."

Everyone watched in amazement. It looked like the beginning of a new bond of friendship between two brothers.

"I wish I had thought of that idea," Melanie said. "Oh well, friends were waiting. Her new pair of jeans should catch their attention."

From a large window in the living room, adults watched Adam. He had his hand on his little brother's shoulder as they strolled along. If only they could have seen the sparkle in Colin's eyes.

The younger boy tilted his head upwards proud of a brother like Adam.

Later that same night...

“Hey man. These eagle feathers all yours? LOOKIT the size of them, WILLYA?”

Adam’s classmates, Tim and Ryan were fascinated.

A variety of eagle photographs were in multi-colored frames. And plastic models and eagle footprint tracks were in moulds. They all hung or sat in various places in Adam’s room.

His small library also had a variety of books on eagles. He proudly showed his friends each part of his collection. There were badges and stamps from other countries as well as cloth patches depicting eagles.

He even had a picture of President Bill Clinton, with the presidential seal of an eagle behind him.

The boys made plans to go hiking on Saturday in search of more eagle sightings. Adam was pleased to see his friends so interested in his hobby.

Ryan and Tim were to ask each of their parents to consider driving them. “Maybe they could take turns. Someone to bring us and someone to come get us,” suggested Tim.

“Nah, no adults. Let’s just go for a walk. Very far Adam?” Ryan asked.

“We could take our bikes up to Dyke Lake,” Adam suggested. “It’s only about half a kilometer. Our neighbor, Mr. Williams owns a cottage there. Maybe have a swim after checking on the eagles.”

“Sounds okay.” the boys answered.

Plans were made, a food list drawn up and excited voices talked about future trips together. “Don’t forget the bathing suits!” someone shouted. Their planned trip created a stronger link between friends.

Adam was sure things were going to be a lot better in school.

CHAPTER TEN

Saturday morning began with a warm breeze. Each boy wore jeans and a t-shirt. Bare arms, and faces were generously lathered with bug repellent. Some of it stung the corner of Adam's mouth.

Grandpa Larry warned him about putting on too much.

Sun block ointment and the air of excitement traveled with them in each car. Everyone's dad was here. Grandpa too.

Having the adults along was a change in plans. The men wanted to take the boys to another spot. This would add to Adam's list of Eagle sighting locations.

Besides, there was always a next time for the boys to go alone. Stories about the eagles at Sheffield Mills were on everyone's lips.

Anyway you put it more of Adam's friends were catching on to the thrill of eagle watching. Adam knew too many had taken the bald eagles for granted.

Adam sat in the first car and looked forward to their new destination.

The ladies decided to go shopping at Bayer's Lake Road mall, near Halifax. They were in the third car.

The first two cars soon turned right off Highway #104, heading north on Fort Ellis Road. But not before they stopped at a variety store for munchies. Pop, chips and chocolate bars were quickly passed across the counter.

Before long, smooth driving on asphalt turned onto a bumpy, graveled road. Choking dust flew behind the first car, almost hiding the second. Isolated houses were more like year round cottages. They looked like sailboats drifting through a misty morning.

By now, the radio was humming, keeping pace with the car tires.

Up ahead, a pair of eagles flew low over treetops. They might have been on a little flying hike of their own; instead hunting for their daily quest of food. Massive wings moved eagerly as the pair longed for a taste of wild rabbit meat. A breeze filtered through layered feathers. They were more like arrows cutting through wispy clouds. Both eagles were silent as shadows sweeping up, down, then sideways in flight. They were heading for a favorite location.

After driving into a small parking lot, the boys noticed an observation shelter alongside the Stewiacke River. It had a large built-in picnic table able to accommodate everyone.

Packs were taken from car trunks. And water bottles as well as food parcels placed in cool shadows. The eagle watchers wanted to hide their lunch and snacks from penetrating rays of warm sunlight.

Treats were passed around, with everyone taking a comfortable position. Each was paired off in order to share one set of binoculars. There were three boys, three fathers and two grandfathers.

And four 7X50 “Glasses” as some people called them.

Each watched eagerly, wanting to be first to see eagles in action. Eight sets of eyes peered through newly cleaned lenses. Magnifications moved rapidly from ‘close’ to ‘distance’ and back again.

Various makes and models of binoculars aimed at the horizon. They swung from side to side, up and down the river. Even focusing above the treetops on the opposite shore, hoping to catch sight of a prize.

Adam searched the woods for an eagle nest similar to the one on Paul's property. The excitement of the moment tempted to begin chewing his nails.

Suddenly, there they were. Ryan and his dad were first to spot the pair, cruising just below the far tree line. Launched by a burst of wind, two dots of black came swiftly towards them, unaware of the watchers.

Waiting people tried not to move unnecessarily. They began to follow every movement with eyes and binoculars. Anxious men and boys were bathed in their own excitement.

The huge birds of prey kept coming closer.

And closer.

Adam had the same burst of feelings he experienced at Kingsport By the Sea. He felt lightheaded, unable to move, barely breathing. He hoped his hammering heart wouldn't scare away these beautiful creatures.

Although the eagles were able to pick out their visitors, they appeared unconcerned. There was no sense of danger. The huge birds were only interested in seeking a snack.

Fish movements in the Stewiacke River below now teased them.

However, the male bald eagle noticed something familiar. A yellow backpack. Yes, it was the young one by the river, who often watched his nest.

As far as the huge eagle was concerned, Adam was a friend.

Is the man-child following me? The bird wondered.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Adam would have traded in his eagle collection to see this eagle tree.

The mature male bald eagle was perched on his favorite lookout. It was a quarter mile from its nest on Paul's family property.

From here, he could see a long distance. And protect his nest, if necessary.

Once this tree was a tall maple with flowing branches. Protection from flowing branches once provided shelter for ruffed grouse. Especially when pursued from prowling coyotes.

Unfortunately new generations of partridge had to rely on other hideouts.

A bolt of lightning lit up the sky, pointing its finger of destruction at the proud tree. In one split second, a large section of its top was splintered.

In a few seasons, the wind tumbled the broken section noisily to the ground. But the remainder of the majestic tree continued to survive. It rested alone and unused, no longer able to provide refuge to wildlife.

Even squirrels were unable to race along its tall length. It was now only a memory of a beautiful tree that grew on the slope of a steep hill.

The tear of seasons further ravaged the damaged tree. Ice and snow forced their way into the ripped bark and split trunk. Over a long period of time, sunlight bore down and warmed the outside of the wood.

And it's bleached form stood out from the surrounding green forest.

It certainly was not pretty to look at. But, it stood strong as steel. It had been honed into a stubborn part of the landscape. And awaited some useful purpose.

Adam was just a tiny baby when it was first discovered.

One day a rustling of massive wings hesitated as it hovered overhead. Piercing eyes checked out the bone white landing zone. In that moment, a huge bald headed eagle decided to christen it with its presence.

For the eagle, it was a perfect perch. From here, his eyes could easily scan the valley below. His nest was far to the left. Tumbling along the base of the hill a river twisted like a rope through the thick forest.

Special eyes could spot any movement along the shore. He could even notice fish movements lurking below the watery surface. When hunger came knocking, it was just a short distance to being satisfied.

Each day became a ritual, settling here, resting and watching.

This was the place from which the bald eagle first spotted Adam and his yellow backpack. He knew the man-child presented no danger to his nest.

CHAPTER TWELVE

“NEATO” Adam was excited another Saturday had finally arrived.

Last night grandma and grandpa said they wanted to go for a ride in the country.

“We have to do some shopping too,” mom said.

Adam had a hard time pretending he didn’t know about their surprise. The boy jumped out of bed and ran to the window. He wanted to shout for all to hear.

But he whispered more to himself. “Paul and I are going to watch eagles today, all by ourselves.”

“SSSH!!” Melanie called from the hallway. “Do you want to spoil their surprise? I shouldn’t have told you anyhow.” Secretly, she was glad she told. These days he seemed to be the family favorite, just because he won that award.

It was rather silly to be jealous of the attention Adam received, him and those eagles. Maybe she shouldn’t be so upset at what her little brother had accomplished.

After all, she already had her own roomful of awards.

“Hey Sis,” Adam said from around the corner. “Come here, I want to show you something. Quick.”

“Why should I?” she asked, sarcasm in her voice.

”Oh, come on. Please.”

Melanie really didn’t like using that tone of voice. How could she say no, when it seemed mysterious? “All right, then,” she said with a shrug.

She wondered why he looked so serious, chewing the end of his pencil.

“I made this for you,” he said, pushing his chair back.

Melanie moved closer, almost afraid it might be a trap. He was probably ready to jump up and say, “Gotcha.”

“What is it?” she dared to ask. Her brother seemed sincere enough. Then she noticed a drawing of an eagle swooping across the sky.

As if reading her thoughts he answered, “I made for you. But I wasn’t sure if you wanted to have the eagle sitting on a branch. Or maybe just flying around.”

Adam looked up at her solemnly.

Melanie was so astonished, she almost passed out. She couldn’t believe the kindness of his gift. Startled, she shook her head, hardly believing he would do this, for her?

After all the times she had been so mean? She swiped at a moisture beginning in one corner of her eye. Sometimes, tears represented sadness. But this was a tear of happiness.

“Why...it’s beautiful, Adam. I like it flying around in the sky, high up and free. Just the way you made it,” she added.

Then she snatched up the drawing. And rushed from the room before she began to bawl in front of him.

“I figured you’d pick the ‘flying’ idea,” Adam said. He wondered where his sister was going in such a hurry.

Now, he’d better get ready for the day. And pretend not to know anything about the surprise trip. Adam liked living in this huge house in the country, at least until theirs was built.

Having a great grandma and grandpa was nice too.

Especially having a sister like Melanie. Colin was cool.

Adam was feeling really happy today. He looked up at the sky and gave a large smile. He tried to imitate Colin's crooked face smile. But he couldn't.

He just knew something very important was going to take place today.

It didn't take long for breakfast to be over. Soon, the car was moving along the highway towards Bass River. *It was heading in the right direction Adam chuckled to himself.*

"Guess where we're going?" Grandma asked.

"Maybe to see the eagles again," Adam said, trying to act innocent.

"Yes. We aren't but you are, and your friend Paul. It was to be a little surprise, but you're too smart for us."

"Thanks. Thanks a lot," Adam said.

"This time we're going to leave you by yourself. Maybe about half an hour until Paul's parents bring him. It will be a chance to be alone with your eagles."

"Remember," mom said, "you'll only be alone for a short while. We're coming back soon. Paul's parents might return for a visit later, after dropping him off. That is, unless they plan to work at their sugar bush camp."

Before long, they were waving goodbye, as they headed down the dusty road. Adam watched as everyone wagged fingers from the van.

Suddenly Adam realized, he was on his own. And now concealed under the foliage of a pleasant smelling spruce tree. His “glasses” pointed towards activity high in the eagle’s nest. How nice it was to be trusted alone by the river.

Imagine, no grownups around to nag him. No sister or brother to tease him, neither. But he did wish Paul would hurry.

Adam had been watching the nest for the past twenty minutes. It looked snug supported by the elbows of large branches. From his hideout it was easy to spot eagle chicks moving around awkwardly.

It was funny to see mother eagle use a wing to sweep the rascals back into the nest. Father eagle must be somewhere else. Adam wondered if he was scouting around for more food for his family.

Their growing appetites must be hard to satisfy, he thought.

Adam was getting hungry too. He wished he were up there waiting his turn to eat. Then he gagged, remembering eagles feasted on beetles, frogs and mice. No thank you, no rodents please.

Good thing grandpa reminded Adam to take his lunch from the car. Before eating he tried out his fishing rod. After a few bites, he caught a neat rainbow trout. This was boss.

Once more the boy placed his binoculars snugly against both eye sockets. “Holy cow,” he exhaled. An eagle was heading right for him. Sure enough, it was the male bald eagle.

It simply appeared out of nowhere. *Maybe it has a secret spot he didn't know about.*
The huge bird circled his nest making sure everything was all right. Suddenly it headed straight up, then down.

After completing a few circles, the eagle returned.

Then a rustling in the grass startled Adam. "Paul!" he exclaimed.

"SSSH. I had to be quiet," Paul said. "I didn't want to frighten your eagle."

Feathery wings were spread full out. It allowed the eagle's majestic form to dive towards the river. The swift moving creature had claws extended ready to scoop up dinner, and repeated this several times.

Back at the nest, eaglets gulped their share of dinner.

The boys eagerly watched this family activity through their binoculars.

And the bald eagle headed once again for the river.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Perhaps a large rainbow trout darted too swiftly behind a rock. Or, reflections from the watery surface played tricks on the rapidly descending eagle.

In any case, the missile-diving hunter was fooled

He plunged deeply into the clear river water. Mistakes were not normal for this bird of prey. Its talons were fully stretched beneath streaking wings.

Luckily for the intended target, the eagle missed its mark.

Splashing and eagle screeching covered both shores. Then momentum carried it to the bottom of the river.

Adam and Paul were quite worried as the eagle thrashed about. It was furious at missing its intended target. The angry creature plowed noisily through the water to the opposite shore.

The huge bird was drenched. And shook itself in bursts of flapping wings. The eagle knew how anxious the female eagle would be. And the babies, hungry and impatient, waiting for more lunch.

Adam's eyes enlarged as he gobbled up the scene before him. Paul simply stared, unable to move or speak.

Imagine, an eagle plunging into the river. And right in front of them!

It lurched around the shore, burdened by the weight of wet feathers. Not really a comical moment, since it resembled a soggy blanket

More shrieks traveled up and down the river. Shaking its head, the eagle cleared water from ears and lungs. The eagle didn't like being unable to make a quick escape into the waiting sky.

Talons dug deeply in the sandy shore. Wings flapped desperately. The eagle was anxious to dry off as quickly as possible.

Adam felt sorry for the father eagle, thinking he had let his eaglets down. "*Poor eagle,*" he thought. "*No fishy snack today.*"

Then he had an idea. Adam dug in his fishing creel and pulled out the rainbow trout he caught before Paul arrived. This was a "keeper" he had planned to show off.

It would make a nice meal on his kitchen table. "What do you think, Paul?" he asked. Should I feed the eagle? He looks unhappy."

"Yes," Paul agreed. "Give it to the eagle."

Cautious steps led Adam to the shoreline.

When the eagle saw the boy approach from the other side, he furiously tried to flap away. However, Its wings still weren't working properly.

His mish-mash of feathers was not dry enough to elevate him.

Seeing the huge bird flapping around helplessly was a sad moment. The best it could do was hop a little, then leap upwards in short bursts, before dropping.

Adam had a healthy respect for those talons. And that sharp beak. From time spent in the library he read they could be quite dangerous. He was surely glad to be on this side of the river.

Perhaps this is what inspired the boy for his act of bravery. The magnificent bald eagle was far enough away, not placing him in danger. So Adam approached the river's edge, only thirty feet separating boy and eagle.

They stared at each other.

The boy could sense each pulse of energy radiating from the other side. Leaning its head to one side, the bald eagle somehow knew the boy meant no harm. He was just a little guy. And carried something yellow on his back.

Adam was careful not to get too close to the current. It flowed swiftly between large boulders on either side.

He hoped the eagle thought of him as a friend.

The wild bird kept flapping its wings slowly, like some huge fan. Constant movement assisted the warm sun in rapidly drying out his feathers.

With a mighty swing, Adam sent his trout sailing over the river. It landed a few feet in front of the eagle. At first the bird jumped up in alarm. Then noticed the boy was not coming any closer.

There was no danger from this man-child.

Its wings kept flapping slowly, intricate feathers just about dry.

Suddenly, one mighty swipe grabbed the nice sized trout. Powerful talons held tightly as the bird lifted gracefully and headed towards the family nest.

The sun warmed the ground sufficiently to produce a thermal.

Now the boys followed the eagle's ascent, their throats in a knot.

Adam's chest pounded against his ribcage. "This is awesome! Wait till I tell grandpa," he said.

"Yah, man!" Paul shouted, giving his chum a high five.

Adam was thrilled to have the opportunity to enjoy this property owned by the Fishers. "Thanks Paul," he said, "for bringing me here."

"It's okay," Paul answered, overcome by the sights he just witnessed.

The boys cleaned the area from candy wrappers, and several pop cans. This was a special place and should remain in a natural state. After one last look at the eagle's nest, they headed back down the trail.

It was nice knowing the father eagle had a meal for his family.

Adam's watch indicated his parents should be at the road by now. "Paul, I'm really glad you were here to see everything," he said. He whistled a happy tune.

A bright yellow backpack jiggled on his shoulders.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The next day during breakfast, Adam's mom brought up something really interesting. She overheard someone talking about a friend who tried to capture an eagle.

Suddenly the boy's interest was on full alert.

"Remember the eagle you saw land in the water, Adam? his mom asked.

"How could I ever forget?" Adam answered between mouthfuls of cereal.

"This fellow was foolishly brave like you. Except, he tried to throw a blanket over it. Kind of dangerous, I'd say. Now, why would anyone want to get near one of those things?"

Adam came to the defense of his eagle friends. "They'd never hurt me mom," he boasted. That evening while looking over his collection of eagle artifacts, he remembered his words.

They wouldn't now, would they?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

One careless moment was all it took on such a nice Saturday morning. Not long ago Adam had been on dry land as he sighted through grandpa's 'glasses.'

They were an excellent quality, especially with their wide-angle lenses.

It didn't matter now as water pressed in around him.

It might have been fun if he had his bathing suit on, or to be wading in the shallow part of the river. Better still, if everyone had simply come for a picnic, to get cooled off.

At least it would be their choice.

Except this wasn't funny, not at all. If only Paul could have come right away instead of later with his parents. He was such a good swimmer and with him here, Adam might not be in this pickle.

Mom and dad said the boys had been very responsible last week. So this week was a repeat. It didn't seem like such a big deal to be left alone, until Paul got here.

But Paul didn't show up for the last couple of hours. In the meantime Adam fished and roamed around.

He was now paying the price for getting too close to the edge. Grandpa said to be careful around the river. But Adam was careless and stood too close as he watched the nest.

When the bank gave away, grandpa's warning was remembered. The slide down the rocky slope into the fast flowing river really hurt. His arm ended up smacking against a rock.

Adam even lost one running shoe trying to scramble up the muddy slope. Then the current gathered him up like a cork and began to float the boy downstream.

He tried to fight the flow of water but it tired him out. Thankfully the current wasn't roaring along like a speeding racecar.

However it was full of swirls. And Adam spent too much energy trying to avoid going around in circles. Good thing dad taught him how to swim. But this current was very strong. Each time he almost made it to shore, the curving water took him in another direction.

"Hellpp! Hellpp!" he managed to say, each time, water splashed against his mouth. *Keep it closed. Keep your cool. Breathe through your nose.* The series of commands bounced around his thoughts.

"Ouch! That hurt." His shoeless right foot kept banging against rocks hiding below the watery current.

He saw where he once stood. Only a short distance away, it was safe and sound. And dry. As he tossed and turned, the safe shore seemed like a memory.

Adam's water-filled eyes could barely see the surrounding forest of green.

"Daaad! Grandpaaa! Paaaul! Where Aaare you?" roared from his mouth at each opportunity. Words repeated as an echo from the hillside. In the past it was fun to shout words and listen for their return. Not much fun now bobbing as a cork in the river.

A gusty wind carried the sounds of the boy's struggle to the male bald eagle. He paused in high flight, before swooping to his special bleached tree. The huge eagle leaned forward on his perch.

Ears tuned in to the commotion not far away. It did not have the same melody of his eaglets or mate. The sound was human!

The predator sensed fear and terror. It was the same as when one of his babies cried out.

He shuffled to the edge of the branch then plunged into the air. A thermal captured his wide-spaced wings and the bird soared upwards.

Circling in a mighty loop the bald-headed eagle headed for the river.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Two hurrying adults burst through the foliage. Adam's father was younger and faster. His new sneakers almost flew across the mossy trail.

Moisture warmed quickly as sweaty feet splashed through muddy puddles.

Grandpa was not far behind.

They had heard Adam's cries as they were parking the car. At first they thought he was calling someone. Perhaps a school chum was visiting from a nearby farm.

They knew it wasn't Paul. He and his parents had just returned from their sugar bush camp. When everything was explained, panic set in. They had left a ten-year old boy, for a few hours. It was a way of showing trust for someone as mature as Adam.

But being left alone by the river was a horrible thought bouncing around in their minds. The enormity of what might have happened suddenly hit them. They ran faster.

The last time they saw their precious son and grandson was several hours ago. They had watched him heading down the trail, eager to search for eagles. Grandpa even loaned his expensive binoculars.

So, what was wrong with leaving him alone? It was safe enough there. Their many trips had proved that. Surely Adam hadn't planned on going swimming?

Checking the shoreline suddenly made them realize how high the river was. "Must be runoff from last night's downpour," Adam's dad said.

The water was churning.

Both adults questioned why they had allowed Adam to be on his own. “You have to trust me,” the boy had stated. Yes, he was old enough to be allowed responsibility.

“Paul is going to be dropped off by his parents in about fifteen or twenty minutes,” grandpa had said. “The same as last week.”

And so the boy had set off along the trail, which was no more than 500 feet to the river. The adults proudly saw he was unafraid of being alone in the woods. Nothing could happen.

Or, so they thought.

In fact, they had sneaked down to check everything was fine. At that time, Adam had been singing to himself while lying on his tummy. His binoculars were pointing skyward.

Scary sounds now forced their way through the trees. “Help! Help-MEEEE!! was coming from someone in trouble. Now they knew for sure it was Adam. And he definitely was in trouble.

Their thoughts were confirmed as they rushed to the shoreline. Where was he? “Adam! Adam!” they shouted. Nothing. They only saw the ‘churl’ of water chasing foamy suds heading down the river.

Not far away, a bobbing head was busy thinking. Adam kicked off his other sneaker, lightening the drag from the river on his left leg.

His soaked denim jeans were getting heavier. They made it difficult to kick free of the current. As his feet struck bottom, he pushed up. Whenever his head broke surface, he expelled stale breath and gathered in fresh air. Then he plunged back down from the force of the current.

Adam didn't know the eagle was quite agitated. And flying slowly up and down the river trying to understand what was happening.

The male eagle gave a warning shriek, signaling mother eagle to keep a sharp eye on her chicks.

Then he spotted something that did not belong in the river. The head was furry, the skin fair. And every once in awhile a cry came forth. Not animal, but human. It was a sad sound that unsettled the peacefulness of his domain.

At first the eagle was confused. Then familiarity reached his brain. The man-child. It was the small one who had fed him.

He saw the boy's form being pulled downstream with the current. On his back was a noticeable yellow bulge. The eagle didn't realize it was a small backpack, not folded up wings.

The full impact of the scene now understood. And the eagle shuddered to a hovering position.

His telescopic eyes zoomed in on the struggling figure. The eagle's fatherly instincts revved up. The eagle didn't falter as he streamed towards the small boy in the water.

His claws were fully outstretched as he headed for Adam's packsack. The boy sensed something behind him. Then he turned and caught a glimpse of the eagle as he swooped low over the water.

And it was coming straight at him.

At about the same time, both adults came through the trees and stood on the shore. They tried to scream, but nothing came out. Like two frozen icicles they watched in fascination.

This predator of the wild was heading towards their boy.

Adam was tired of doing his jack-in-the-box trick. And continued holding his breathing as he sunk to the bottom. Then he kicked upwards, breaking surface, gathering in fresh air.

Each time, he was able to bob only a few moments.

Suddenly a wingspan of feathers blotted out the sun. It was the male bald eagle! Adam knew there was going to be a crash. He crossed his arms, clenched his teeth and closed his eyes tightly.

Sharp talons pierced his backpack. The force of the impact lifted the boy forward, half dragging him across the surface of water.

Stocking feet skittered like skateboards across the surface. It seemed impossible to believe, but it was happening. Adam knew the eagle was carrying him to safety.

He raised both hands, reached up and grasped the eagle around his powerful, downy legs. Suddenly Adam was falling to the ground, as the eagle released his talons.

His dad and grandpa came out of their trance. What they saw was hardly believable. A story they would repeat often to their friends and neighbors.

Then both jumped into the river and splashed towards Adam.

His stomach had bumped to a halt on top of the soft grass. In a few moments Adam retched several times.

But, being back on land was wonderful. As he curled up on the shore he saw something even more exciting, dad and grandpa scrambling out of the river.

As they grabbed and hugged him, Adam began to cry.

It sounded like both adults were doing the same.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

High above a dark speck screeched. Then the eagle lowered his wings and dropped swiftly, like a stone. He completed a few circles above the huddle of two men and a boy.

He was also pleased to see his own nest in order. Mother eagle and chicks were busy nurturing each other, not bothered by the commotion below.

The bald eagle swooped once, then twice over the scene by the river's bank. Three people looked up in awe. Their eyes were thankful with each passing swoop of feathers.

"Mom! Grandma!" Adam shouted, spotting them on the opposite shore.

A chorus of eagle cries joined those from the humans below. And the bald eagle finally settled in with his waiting family.

Adam hugged his grandpa and dad. This was a super duper, decadent chocolate squeeze.

"I lost the binoculars," he said sadly.

Neither of the men minded right now.

Adam was able to stop shivering and relax. His heart had stopped pounding rapidly. His soaked shirt and pants had been quickly removed. Grandpa and dad looked funny without their shirts.

The boy had one across his shoulders. The other wrapped around his legs.

It didn't bother him when dad carried him across a shallow spot in the river. Adam also didn't mind kisses on the cheek from the ladies.

The boy looked around. At the hill, then the river. Finally his eyes rested on the eagle's nest. His eyes were wet. He wasn't sure if it was tears, or river water.

Adam knew one thing for certain. The eagles were truly his friends.

And he would visit here often.

* * *

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Note: Richard and Esther went to Sheffield Mills, to see the Eagle's Watch weekend. It was so awesome; Richard began taking notes. A young girl of ten asked why he was writing and when told about a book was to be she said, "Good. There are no stories about eagles in our library." (This book young lady was written for you).