

Book 1

The Kenny Cartwright Chronicles:

FEATURING RECENTLY
DECLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS

RICH UNKEL

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FEATURING RECENTLY DECLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS

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About the Author

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1.

In The Big Inning

“I really do love baseball.” – *President Ronald Reagan*

“My parents have always called me Rich, for which I am very grateful. Names, and their nicknames, carry a hefty weight in childhood.”

Please keep in mind, when someone adds a “y” to the end of their name, it doesn’t mean they are little and cute. Think about someone you know whose name ends with the letter “y”. You might think of names such as Jimmy, Mikey, Johnny, Bobby and so on. Now, tell me your thoughts about those names. Sure, these nicknames are given to boys as babies, with hopes they will be pleasant, gracious children. Why is it that when they grow up to be pre-teens they are totally opposite? Kenny is exactly that: completely contrary to his infant name. He has grown to be stout, aggressive, curious, and, thankfully for me, gullible.

Our town—rural—with endless potential is full of history, which gives it mysterious charm. We have everything from haunted houses to a genuine Revolutionary War Fort; however, it is lacking in one area, friends. Yes, ‘in previous years’ I had the essentials: imaginary friends, who had run their course of endless hours of entertainment. When it seemed I was getting too old for Pal Petey, my parents were whispering concerns of my needing counseling. I thought all fourth graders sucked their thumbs and had a favorite blanky. Apparently they didn’t, so I had to ditch all my bad habits quickly and find a neighborhood peer with whom to interact. My sisters were out of the question, as they were older in age yet annoying in all aspects. Sometimes I found myself so desperate I would snap out of a mood and realize I had been playing civilly with them. Scary. I would then have to resort to ending the event quickly to save my pride. I would do an atomic bomb on the Monopoly game or run the cars off the road in the Game of Life. They would scream and hate me; I felt satisfied knowing we were a normal sibling trio of happiness.

I needed a friend. Kenny Cartwright lived down the road in my neighborhood. He lived close. When I was young, I wasn’t allowed to walk down to his house. In fact, I didn’t even know he lived there. The first time I saw him, we were driving past his house and he was playing outside with his younger brother, George. I always wondered who he was. I wasn’t sure if having a brother was fun. I knew having sisters wasn’t.

When we were six years old, we finally connected. Yes, I saw Kenny at school and at the playground, but it’s different there. School was great, don’t get me wrong, but you can’t do a ton of fun stuff there. Things like sledding, running, yelling, drawing, playing hide-and-seek, wrestling, fishing, hunting, playing football, and swimming are impossible to do during school hours and on school grounds. I understand that schools had rules and I obeyed them; but, come on, there was so much to explore in this world. This made the weekends really busy. Kenny and I made our first connection playing the game of baseball.

One weekend, we all gathered at the town primary school where there was a baseball diamond. All of the town’s proud Dads brought their little boys to the field, hoping their boy would be the star. We wore gloves that didn’t fit and hats that were too big. We were

excited because we all had the same blazing red hats and official baseball shirts. We were proud to be the Red Barons. Some local business sponsored us and was nice enough to buy them for us. Our coach was a little too serious about the game and we were acquainted quickly with sit-ups and push-ups. Thankfully, the grass was tall and I could make the coach believe I was actually doing them, grunting along with a slight move of the elbows.

We boys were salivating at the mouth to get a chance to whack the ball off the tee. We were instructed that after we hit the ball we would sprint as fast as we could to first base. The other half of the team was out in the infield learning to field the ball and throw to first. Each Dad would stand next to his son and help him out. As batters, we were learning the basics of hitting and base running.

I knew I could wail that ball. Swinging for the upper deck, I hit the ball right to the third baseman Kenny and his backup Dad, Ken, Sr. As I sprinted to first base, I saw, out of the corner of my eye, Kenny running toward me.

“Throw it, Kenny,” the supporting cast yelled.

He didn't. He ran after me, tagging me with his glove while I stood on first base.

“You're out,” he yelled.

Adults ran over to explain to Kenny I was safe and you had to throw the ball to the first baseman. Knowing the game, I ran for second with speed while looking over my shoulder. Kenny emerged from under all the tall legs, which resembled trees, and chased me to second. Then third. So, I went for it, and ran home in a mad dash, crossing the plate in a sea of red screaming baseball players.

“You hit a home run,” they were saying. Kids were excitedly throwing their gloves in the air and celebrating. The Dads were scratching their heads. Kenny, struggling over our joy, was stomping his feet.

Being a T-ball hero wasn't really a big accomplishment but it was the beginning in that big inning. A start of a friendship, for sure.

1.

When the Wheel Spoke

“If you worried about falling off a bike, you’d never get on.”-*Lance Armstrong*

Kenny and George are brothers. They are only a year apart. They have no other brothers or sisters. Their house, big and white, is down the road a bit. Their parents don’t talk to me much and that is fine with me. Kenny’s dad has always side-eyed me since the days of T-ball. Maybe he didn’t approve of my on-the-field tactics. Regardless of me, Kenny and George have to have everything the same. Whatever Kenny has, George has to have the same thing. If Kenny is over at a friend’s, then George has to be, too. If not, then Kenny can’t go over to that friend’s house. Very cheesy.

Yesterday, we drove by their house and Kenny and George were outside on their brand new bikes. Kenny had a Batman bike; so, you guessed it, George had a Robin bike. They were crime fighters, fighting crime from their bicycles. When we drove by, Kenny spotted me in the car and rapidly chased our car home. Pulling in the driveway, I knew he would be right there showing off his new bike. In reality, his bike was better than mine but I didn’t want him to know that.

He pulled in the driveway doing a burn out and slid to a stop right in front of my feet. “Look,” he said. “I am Batman.”

“How so?” I asked.

“Because I have a Batman bike and George has a Robin bike,” said Kenny.

“Batman and Robin weren’t brothers,” I informed Kenny. I got my bike and rode out of the driveway, making sure I was slightly ahead of Kenny. “So, what tricks can you do with your Batman bike? Can you launch off jumps the same way I can?”

Earlier that day I had made a jump out of two red bricks and a board. I hadn’t dared to use both bricks and was getting the nerve up by only using one. “Kenny, crime fighters have to be able to jump over obstacles to save the day. Everybody knows that.”

“True,” said Kenny.

“Plus, you have to be able to leap tall buildings,” I instructed.

“Isn’t that Spiderman?” Kenny asked.

“All super heroes are the same, Kenny,” I pointed out.

So there lay the two bricks and the board. “Go down to the end of the street and pretend you are chasing the bad guy,” I coached Kenny. Kenny did so and started to pedal fast. The look on his face was that of all seriousness fighting crime. What he hadn’t seen were the two dirt balls I had made and that the two bricks were now turned upright instead of flat, making the jump much higher than when he drove away from it. As he gained speed, I sat cross-legged on the ground. Nearing the jump, he was riding that bike faster than I had ever gone myself.

Kenny hit the jump at full speed, rocketing into the air as a space shuttle. He peaked so high I could see the underside of his bike. While in midair, I pelted him with two dirt

bombs, striking him both times. The Batman bike hit the ground on both tires and sprung up into the air as a bouncing basketball. While in mid-bounce, his body and bike tilted, which propelled him off the road where he rolled down a hill.

Dust and debris were everywhere. Kenny was stained from rolling on the grass and being smacked with dirt balls. The bricks had fallen and the board was broken. My laughter was too loud and I wasn't aware of my surroundings. My mother had been right behind me, watching this terrible scheme unfold.

"Kenny, are you OK?" my concerned mother asked the fallen crime fighter. Her loving voice startled me, bringing me back to reality. Right then, I needed a real super hero to get me out of there.

"I'm fine, Mrs. Peterson. I'm not sure what happened."

"You go home and clean up, Kenny, and have your mom call me."

The next words spoken were at a much higher volume and less loving than those spoken to Kenny.

"Get in your room now and stay there."

I was grounded for quite some time.

Free Sample

1.

Wooden Spoon Salesman

“All I am I owe to my mother. I attribute all my success in life to the moral, intellectual and physical education I received from her.” –*George Washington*

Now that I have been released from being grounded, it is nice to smell the outdoors, instead of the odor of my well-used socks in my room. I am not the neatest of boys and cleaning my room always got in the way of my idea factory. My bedroom is the hub of thoughts and schemes. So, when I am grounded it is just more time for me to think and plot. There are no distractions. Mountain Dew and Xbox are my two best friends during times of exile. Now I am free again. Free to put those ideas to good use.

My mom says video games and junk food are rotting my brain. According to her tales, my brain is a muscle and it needs to be worked. So, she signed me up for 4-H. It was a group of kids who met once a week at an old lady's house. We did crafts and even learned to sew. Her house was absolutely covered in crafty things. I should have my mom see her house. If she did she wouldn't be judgmental of my bedroom. Our 4-H leader was a lot like me, with many strategically placed piles. Only difference was I was not into having piles of felt, glue, googly eyes, yarn and things of that nature. Her passions were different from mine, things I figure I will never really need to learn.

Last year in 4-H, we baked pies for Thanksgiving. Of course, I chose pumpkin and only put the canned pumpkin in it. I neglected to put any sugar or cinnamon in it. You should have seen the look on my dad's face when he took a huge bite into an unsweetened pumpkin pie. It was priceless. Hey, I was only 9.

The bus takes us to 4-H after school. After we are done, all the mothers are in the driveway waiting to pick up their little ones. Kids run outside and show their mommies what they'd made. The mothers responded with fruity statements such as, “There's my little artist.” Or “Here comes the future Michelangelo” and one time I even heard, “My son, the next president.”

Yeah, I was thinking, that will never happen.

One particular recent week we did a quick craft, and then our leader went on to explain how we were “selected” to represent 4-H by selling items, such as important stuff for the kitchen, door-to-door and to our relatives. This, we were told, was to raise money for 4-H. It didn't seem like an honor to me. We had to go and sell kitchen stuff to family members who already had a kitchen full of things. How can a kid convince their grandmother to buy an expensive whisk? This was a shady idea and I knew I wasn't going to receive the “salesman of the year” award.

We all lugged our sales boxes outside and, when I looked around, my mother wasn't there.

“You are coming home with us,” said Kenny's mom, from her car.

What? When it came to carpooling, my mother was like an octopus. She would figure a way for me to hitch a ride with anyone “going that way”. So I had to ride home with

Kenny and George who were so excited to compete with each other on who was going to sell more. I didn't want any part of this. I was planning on having my stuff gather dust.

"Can we stop at Gramma Bebop's?" Kenny shouted from the back seat. Gramma Bebop? I turned to Kenny with a look, as if I'd eaten a lemon and sat on a tack at the same time.

"Yeah, that's what we've always called her," Kenny replied, seeming as if he'd just realized it was a totally ridiculous name for his grandmother.

I didn't know the reason and I was sure I didn't want to hear the historical account of how the term Grandma became "Gramma Bebop."

When we pulled in the driveway Kenny and George raced to the door with their sales suitcases and bombarded their grandmother with kitchen supplies. I followed behind civilly, knowing old people didn't like it when you ran in their house. When I got inside, she was already surrounded by every type of measuring cup, spatula and apple peeler. Of course, she had to buy equal amounts from both Kenny and George. They took her cash and put it into their little white envelopes, which they then put back in their suitcases.

"Are you selling things, too?" she asked, looking at me.

I proudly replied, "Yes, Ma'am." I learned old people loved it when you said 'Yes, Ma'am' and 'Yes, Sir', because it reminded them of when they were young.

She just smiled at me and said, "No, thank you."

"Yes, Ma'am," I responded with a little grumble in my voice. If being a salesman was always about being told 'no' then I was not cut out for sales.

Kenny's grandmother's living room was like a museum. It was filled with antique furniture, lamps and trinkets. There was not one ounce of dust and there were lines on the rug where the vacuum had recently been. We were sent there so Kenny's mom and grandmother could have some "adult" time, which meant they had some major complaining to do about their lives. I wasn't born yesterday.

"Let's watch TV," I suggested. Kenny ran and grabbed the remote and changed the channel to some show about zebras.

George, trying to grab the remote, spoke firmly, "No, Kenny, this is boring; cartoons are better."

"George, it is not your choice, right?" Kenny said, looking at me.

"Kenny, I made zero sales in the kitchen. The least I deserve is to make the choice of what we watch. Plus, I am your guest," I said, confidently. You could see the wheels turning in Kenny's head. For some reason, someone put into law the guest had more power than the people who owned the house and I was going to take advantage of it.

"You're not a guest, we all are. This is my grandmother's house," protested Kenny. Well, that pretty much sealed the deal that I was going to side with George.

"Yes, George, I fully agree with you. Cartoons are a good choice," I said calmly, nodding my head. "That is two votes for cartoons and one vote for zebras. Zebras lose, Kenny," I added, for good measure.

George marched up to Kenny, held out his hand, demanding the remote. I just sat back to watch the show. Not the show on TV, the “Kenny vs. George show”. It was about to begin.

Kenny shoved George out of the way. Kenny turned toward the TV when George jumped on Kenny’s back and took him to the floor. As a responsible citizen, I should have stopped this bout.

I looked at Kenny and said, “Wow, you are weaker than your little brother.”

Kenny’s face got bright red and he shrieked, “Get off my back, George.”

From the couch I reminded Kenny it wasn’t polite to yell and insisted he should use his “inside voice.”

In a primal sounding language, George grunted, ‘yeah’, directly into Kenny’s ears.

This was all quickly stopped by the flinging open of the living room doors. It was like an Old West movie where the swinging doors of an old saloon whip open and a hard stare down commences. But, in Mrs. Cartwright’s holster wasn’t a six shooter, it was a wooden spoon.

Hey, I thought, *that’s the wooden spoon from my sales suitcase*. Mrs. Cartwright was waving that spoon, still wrapped in plastic, high above her head. “What in the world is going on in here?” she bellowed, giving me the chills.

Kenny and George, who were shaped like a ball of anger, instantly straightened out and stood at attention. She meant business. Kenny and George quickly tried to make their story sound as if it was “G” rated. It wasn’t and she knew it. Their bologna made her grow more furious. Kenny’s mom wasn’t tall but it didn’t matter. She had tremendous power. I wouldn’t mess with her.

As she walked over to them she stopped and pointed her wooden weapon at me and asked abruptly, “Were you in on this, too?”

Without any hesitation, I quickly replied with huge round eyes, “No, and I tried to stop them, Mrs. Cartwright, and they wouldn’t listen to me. It is so frustrating.”

As the spoon was heard cracking against their butts, I slightly smirked. Kenny’s mother whacked them with a spoon and put it back in the kit without paying for it. As far as I was concerned, it was now used. It had been my only sale that year and I was proud to buy it myself. That infamous wooden spoon now hangs on my bedroom wall as one of the most prized, unofficial trophies I have ever received.

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