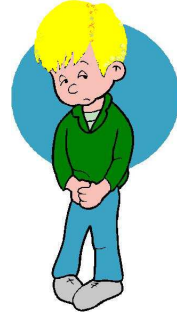


Peter the Greatest

“Go ahead,” encouraged the brown boy. “Say it.”

“Rule?” tried Pete in a small voice. He just knew he was going to hate this new school. Everything here was so different than it was in Minnesota. Why did his dad have to get transferred to Los Angeles anyway? Now he couldn’t even say people’s names. He just didn’t belong here.



“That’s close,” encouraged the brown boy. “Try again. The name is RAH-OOOOL.” The boy said it slowly and broke the word into two separate sounds.

“Rah-ool,” repeated Pete slowly trying the feel of the new word on his tongue.

“Yeah, that’s it,” said Raul approvingly. “But you can just say it out. You know, like Raul.”

“Raul,” echoed Pete a little louder. The corners of his mouth began to turn up as he realized he was saying it the right way.

“You got it now,” approved Raul. “Just sing it out. It won’t bite and it won’t hurt. Just say ‘Raul.’ Yeah, that’s the word.” Raul began to dance around on the sidewalk as he talked. It sounded good. He tried it again.

“It won’t sting and it won’t hurt. Just say RAUL. Yeah, that’s the word.”



Pete watched in admiration and began to grin at the other boy’s antics.

“Now if you want a name that stings, try this one,” said Raul as he turned and faced Pete. He drew himself up as tall as possible, took a deep breath, and with a wave of his hand and a deep bow he said, “Rrrrrra-ooooool Rrrrrrodrrrrrrrriuezzzzz!” The way he said the R sound reminded Pete of drums in a parade. He could never say that!



Raul straightened up and continued, “Now that’s a name that stings and bites. It growls along and bays at the moon and it growls some more and ends with a Zorro sword stroke” and he made all the right moves.

“That’s my whole name,” he grinned, “But I don’t expect you to say it like that. Just Raul would be fine.

“What’s your name?” Raul asked and held out his hand.

“My name is Peter but I like to be called Pete.” Peter shook the offered hand. This was the first time he ever shook hands with another kid but it felt good. His name did not bite and sting. In fact, his name always

made kids laugh. Peter Peterson was always turned into Peter Peter Pumpkin Eater.

“What’s your last name?” asked Raul.

“Peterson,” answered Pete reluctantly. Here it comes, he thought, the dreaded Pumpkin Eater.

“Peterson. That means son of Peter, doesn’t it? Is your dad named Peter, too?”

Pete nodded, “And his father, too.” Might as well get it over with and let everyone know that he came from a whole family of Pumpkin Eaters.

“Awesome!” exclaimed Raul. “It’s like standing in those mirrors in the clothes stores where you see whole lines of you going on forever. The one behind you is your dad and the one behind that is his dad and on and on.

“Just think—somebody back there had to be really something to start the whole line being named after him. Maybe it was Peter the Great!”

Pete smiled in spite of himself. “I don’t think so,” he said. “Peter the Great was Russian and my family is from Sweden or Norway.”



He had never thought of who the first Peter in the line might be. If he had thought about it he would probably have decided it must have been the guy that invented pumpkins.

“Well then,” said Raul, “Maybe it was someone even greater than Peter the Great. Maybe it was Peter the Greatest.”

Just then two more boys came walking toward the bus stop.



“Hey, guys,” yelled Raul, “Come and meet the new guy. His name is Pete.”

“Hi, Pete,” they said as they arrived.

“His name is Pete Peterson which means Peter, Son of Peter, and he is descended from the Viking Peter the Greatest!”

Pete opened his mouth to say that wasn't really true when Raul stopped him with a wave of his hand.

“Maybe,” he added with a wink and a shrug.

“Yeah, maybe,” Pete agreed with a smile as he got on the school bus.

He began to sketch a Viking helmet on the front of his notebook as he listened to his new friends chatter about school and teachers. Maybe this would work out after all.

