

The Mystery of the Silver Statue: One Author's Journey

by Ray Perkins

Where does one find the inspiration to write a book? In my case, it evolved from the confluence of several ideas, some based on research, and others on life experiences. I'm referring to my recently completed work of fiction, which has just been published by Radiant Hen Publishing of Coventry.

The Mystery of the Silver Statue started out as a short story I had written for my Coventry seventh- and eighth-graders during my very first year of teaching in 1982. The presenter at the Vermont Writing Process workshop that I attended that winter suggested that teachers write alongside their students, and when I got back to the classroom, I did just that. I wrote!

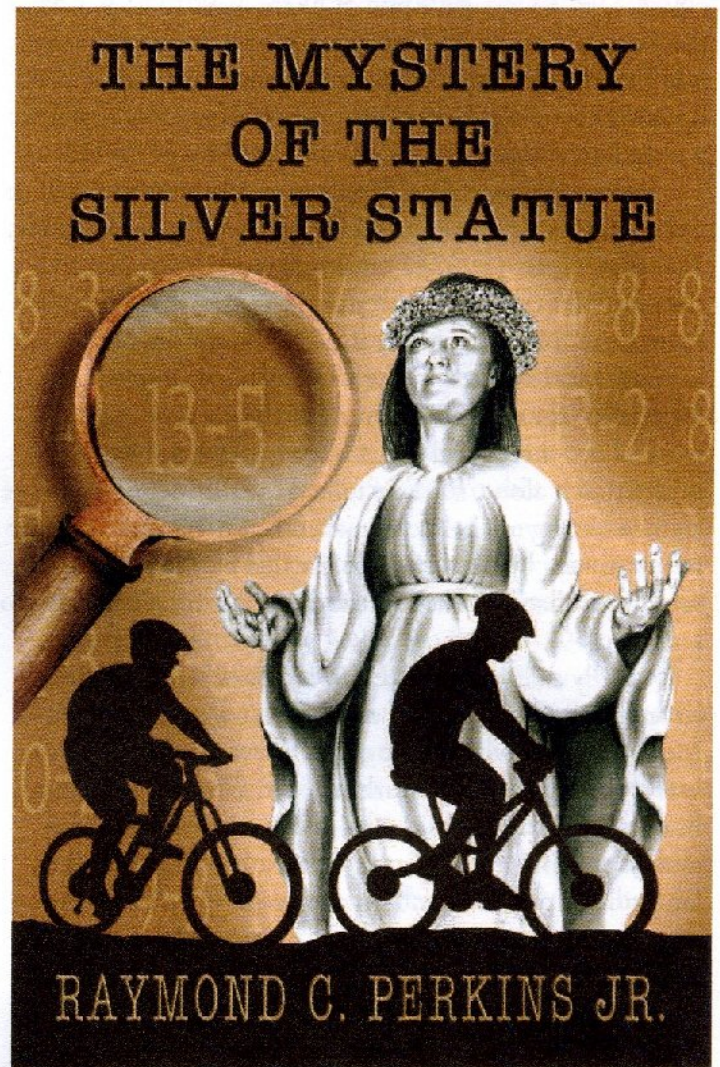
We brainstormed numerous topics together and the one I chose was a blending of stories I had heard from my uncles at family gatherings, experiences growing up in a large family, and tales told by the late Vermont historian, professor, and State Senator Graham S. Newell, while I was a student at Lyndon State College.

After setting the short story aside for a couple of years, I happened upon it one day as my wife, Mary, and our two sons, Jeremy and Jason, and I packed to move into the house in Barton that we had recently purchased from my in-laws. There it lay, in a box of school materials, just waiting to be taken up again. The motivation to write hit me like a December snowstorm, and write I did!

While pretending to assist my wife as she papered and painted her way through the large, six-bedroom farmhouse desperately in need of repair, I wrote, filling notebook after notebook. Looking back, I know it wasn't a Steinbeck, or even a Bredes (my freshman English teacher and now famous Sheffield author), but it was a start.

Somehow, I convinced my dear, nimble-fingered wife to type it for me, as I had never learned the art of typing very successfully. At 15 words a minute, even a 100-page manuscript was a mountain I just couldn't bring myself to climb. The fact that I now had secured a somewhat willing typist and editor for my book was more than a husband could ever ask for.

After it was written and typed, I read passages to my sons and to my sixth grade social studies class at Barton Academy. To my pleasant surprise, the story went over with a bang. I thought this baby was going to be an easy



Ray Perkins recently had his first book, *The Mystery of the Silver Statue*, published by Radiant Hen Publishing. Illustrations are by Stephanie L.C. Perkins of Essex.

sell and I'd have publishers knocking at my door, maybe even a big advance. Visions of lucrative contracts danced in my head, but much to my chagrin, the hard work had only begun.

I queried several publishers of books for young readers and I heard back from them all. The rejection letters were devastating. I decided to put *The Silver Statue* away. It was mostly forgotten, except for the annual mention of it when my sixth-graders studied the French and Indian War.

Then, one sunny fall day after a particularly enthusiastic class discussion about Rogers' Rangers, I decided to submit it to a writers' agency. The response I got back renewed my hopes. They liked it and offered me

a contract so they could pitch it to publishers themselves, for a handsome fee. One publisher they sent my work to responded by saying I might consider changing the characters to set the story apart from the competition, and so the evolution began.

The main characters in the story took on new lives as I wove in some of the traits of my sons. I gave the lead character a disability and partially focused the story on his attempts to overcome his own teenage issues, some real and some imagined. The transformation from a strictly adventure story to one that would include overcoming adversity seemed to be a turning point, but there was one last test. Would the kids at school still like it?

When my youngest son, Nick, was a fourth-grader at Barton, his teacher happily agreed to let me read to her class during my daily lunch break. As I read, they listened attentively and they gave me plenty of honest feedback.

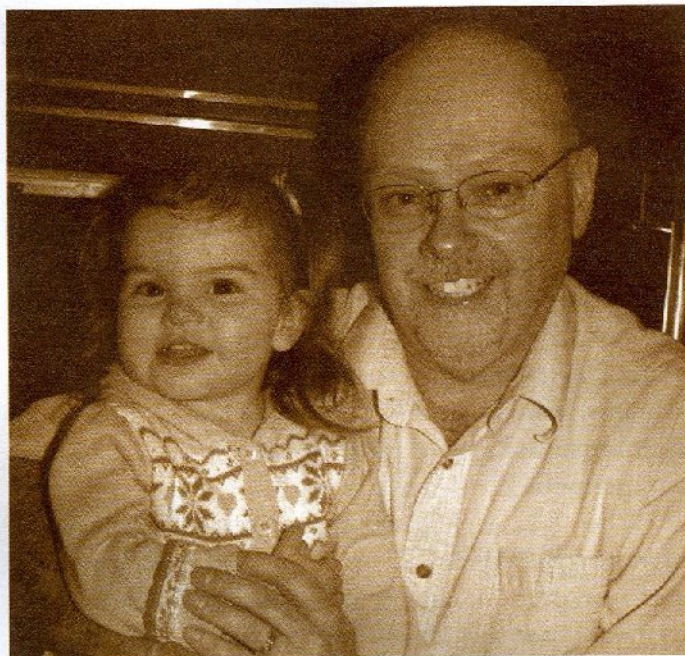
"What does that mean?" "Is that really possible?" "I like it a lot!" "When can you read more?" "Why does B.T. have such a hard time keeping up?"

While I scribbled furiously to take accurate notes of their comments, I answered questions as thoughtfully and thoroughly as possible. At home in the evenings my daughters, Kristen and Kendra, would listen, help me type, and give me additional feedback. The pieces seemed to be falling into place. The last remaining hurdle remained my greatest dilemma: finding a publisher.

Once again, I put my writing and my fragile author's ego on the line. First, I e-mailed my manuscript to some publishers that asked for only a little money from me while they garnered most of the profits. Several times, I came close to agreeing on a deal, but backed out because it just didn't feel right. I cringed at the idea of paying up front to publish my book.

Then, one day at school, our guidance counselor, who was already a published author [Tanya Sousa of Coventry, who is also one of the owners of the Radiant Hen], asked to read my manuscript. She really enjoyed it and asked if her new publishing company could publish it for me. "The rest is history" as the old cliché goes.

I don't know what the public response to my writing will be, but I do know that my family and I are extremely excited. It's been a long, arduous journey, but one that has been both humbling and satisfying, and one I'll never forget. ■



The author, Raymond C. Perkins Jr., seen here with his granddaughter Kaelani, is in his twenty-eighth year of teaching middle school social studies. He lives with his wife and three children in Derby Line.

To buy a copy of *The Mystery of the Silver Statue*, send a check or money order for \$9.95 plus \$3 shipping and handling (for delivery in the U.S.) to Ray Perkins Jr. at P.O. Box 832, Barton, VT 05822. Also check out his website at www.silverstatue.com. People with questions about the book can call (802) 323-4944 or (802) 525-6277. The book is also sold in area stores.

BOOKS+

We edit, design and lay out all types of books and publications!

Journals
Fiction or Nonfiction
Children's Books
Educational and Training
Manuals, Town Reports
Story Books and Novels

Historical Books
Poetry Books
Biographies and Memoirs
Magazines, Newsletters
Periodicals, Flyers, Ads
Photograph Repair & Scans

Proud to have worked behind the scenes on
The Mystery of the Silver Statue!



Perron Graphics 802.525.1115
tjlj@perrongraphics.com
The Little House DTP
littlehouse@westglover.com



The Mystery of the Silver Statue

by Tanya Sousa

It's only fitting that Ray Perkins wrote a book based on a real Vermont historical mystery because he's been teaching social studies and history for over 28 years. He not only loves his subject, he is an exceptional teacher who cares as much about the wellbeing of kids as their grades. He's also an avid reader. The result of these elements, knowledge of history, a love and understanding of children, and appreciation for good stories, was his manuscript of *The Mystery of the Silver Statue*.

When I was a child, the chapter books I read were interesting but still innocent. There wasn't swearing, good won over evil, and there weren't any embarrassing details about things I wasn't old enough to understand yet. *Silver Statue* brought me back to thoughts of those books when I first read the manuscript. The story is good clean fun for those mid-range readers who are beyond picture books (although I say that carefully because I am not beyond them!), but not reading tomes the size of *Harry Potter*.

I remember when Ray read the book to a fourth-grade class at Barton Graded School; the excitement was electric. The students loved the tale, and they loved knowing a real author. How does it get better than having someone succeed with a dream in front of kids' eyes? It shows them the possibilities.

I've always known Ray to be a man open to possibilities, and open to the good in people. How could Radiant Hen Publishing not be part of bringing his story alive? ■



Ms. Sousa is one of the owners of Radiant Hen Publishing.



USA SPORTSWEAR & PROMOTIONAL PRODUCTS

Our Business is to Promote Your Business

Wanda Webster
Sales Representative

SHIRTS • HATS • MUGS and so much more!

264 Perron Hill
Glover, VT 05839

802.525.1127
888.523.6656

northmountain@hughes.net

www.usasportswear.net



Come visit Dave and Beth Bouffard and staff.
They know what their customers want...
**QUALITY, GOOD PRICES,
and SERVICE WITH A SMILE**



Derby Village Store

Call 766-2215 • Main Street, Derby