

A chapter from the book, *Reaching for A Dream*
By Raymond Gerson

Reaching for a Dream – Chapter 1

Gramps paused at the door of Tommy's bedroom, and looked at him as he lay sleeping. Gramps thought about how he had raised the boy since his childhood accident. He reflected on the bond of love between them.

Gramps gently closed Tommy's bedroom door, walked quietly to the living room, and settled comfortably into his favorite chair. The moonlight streamed in the big bay window and illuminated the room. Gramps' silver hair shone in the soft evening's light, and his brown eyes twinkled as he reflected on the wonderful days he and Tommy shared. Mental images of the two of them talking, hiking, and playing basketball together filled his heart with joy. Shadow, Tommy's collie, rested quietly near the fireplace as Gramps reminisced.

He noticed a blue spiral-bound notebook laying on the end table next to his chair. The notebook contained a story Tommy had written entitled "The Rope Climber." Gramps had no way of knowing how important the story was for his grandson or the part it would play in his life. Before satisfying his curiosity and reading the story, he placed the notebook on his lap, leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes, and reflected on how he had raised his grandson from early childhood.

He recalled how he and his wife, Lea, gladly accepted the responsibility of raising Tommy nine years ago. Since Lea's death seven years ago, Gramps raised Tommy by himself. Tommy's parents and his baby sister were killed when he was only eight years old. Tommy lost his right leg in that auto accident. Life had not been easy for Tommy, but Gramps was striving to provide the best upbringing he can.

Gramps' childhood was also filled with difficulties. He lived on a farm in South Dakota during the Great Depression. Severe dust storms ruined most of his family's crops. He learned what it meant to be a survivor, to struggle, to overcome obstacles. Despite the hardships of his early years, Gramps always had ready smiles and warm hugs for Tommy. As an adult, Gramps experienced several business failures before owning and operating a successful chain of dry cleaning stores in Corpus Christi, a beautiful coastal town in the southern part of Texas.

Gramps had moved to Corpus Christi many years ago from Fargo, South Dakota. He loved being near the water and enjoying the mild winters of "the sparkling city by the sea." He felt that this community provided a healthy environment in which to raise a family. Although he sold his dry cleaning chain and retired, he continued to serve as a part-time consultant for the same group of businesses he once owned.

Gramps opened his eyes and became aware of the spiral-bound book on his lap. He put on his reading glasses, picked up the notebook, and glanced at the title, "The Rope Climber."

Several days ago Tommy had gone to a vocational guidance counselor to take some tests. Tommy recently celebrated his seventeenth birthday, and he wanted to make a decision about his future career goals and whether or not to attend college. One of the vocational tests consisted of a series of pictures and Tommy was asked to write a story expressing what he thought was happening in each picture. Gramps now remembered Tommy telling him about a picture of a muscular young man who was holding a rope that was dangling from the ceiling. "Evidently," thought Gramps, "this picture triggered Tommy's article." He adjusted the lamp on the end table for better lighting and began to read.

The Rope Climber By Tommy Hudson

Joe Danton always wanted to be somebody. He longed to accomplish something that he would feel was important. Deep in his heart he felt he would succeed at reaching an important goal someday, although at times he had his doubts. He knew the pursuit of this goal would be a long and difficult struggle filled with many disappointments. However, Joe also felt that he must never give up hope and he held on firmly to his dream of accomplishing something great. Joe ached to do well at something. He tried different jobs and participated in a variety of college courses without discovering what he wanted to do with his life.

One day Joe went into a gym and noticed a rope hanging from the ceiling. He felt a sudden urge to climb this rope and he imagined a crowd cheering him on. It was difficult to climb but he made it to the top using both his arms and legs. He decided to practice every day. After many heartaches and defeats, Joe succeeded in climbing the rope with only the use of his hands. He continued to practice every day for several years. Finally he became an excellent rope climber. An opportunity of a lifetime came when rope climbing was reintroduced as an Olympic sport and he was chosen to represent the United States. Joe and nine other young men, each representing a different country, successfully

completed the Olympic trials and qualified for the finals. In the finals a young man from Russia was the first to climb. He was an awesome sight to behold, with rippling muscles on top of muscles. The Russian climbed to the top quickly and gracefully in only 5.2 seconds. The others followed, but no one could beat the Russian's time. Finally, it was Joe's turn. His girlfriend and his parents were in attendance, and they anxiously watched as he concentrated in preparation for this great moment. Several times he went through the climb mentally. The opportunity he had hoped for, prayed for, and worked his heart out for had arrived. Joe was ready. He went for it with all that he had in him. Victory! 5.0 seconds! A new world record! A gold medal! The crowd went crazy! A new Olympic hero! A dream come true! Years later Joe realized the significance of this Olympic accomplishment. It symbolized the struggle of life as one attempts to climb to the top and attain one's goals. Joe learned that we can make a dream come true if we really want it, if we are willing to work for it, if we are willing to reach deep within ourselves and pull out the best we have to give.

Gramps was deeply moved. A tear of joy glistened in the corner of his eye, and his heart welled with pride when he reflected on the depth of Tommy's insights. He placed the notebook on the end table and thought further about the article. "How interesting that Tommy would write this type of narrative," he mused. "I have been trying to instill in him the desire to become the finest person he can be. I've always encouraged him to bring out the best in himself." Gramps was wise enough to understand that Tommy identified with the rope climber. "What is significant," thought Gramps, "is that Tommy created a character who eventually succeeded. Perhaps he visualizes his life as one that will be filled with struggles, failures, hard work, heartaches, and obstacles, but deep within himself Tommy believes he will overcome and succeed. It's true that his performance in school had been mediocre up to this time and he certainly hadn't excelled in sports or any other activities, but I know that he is going to find his way and will excel at something one day." Gramps casually readjusted his posture as he continued thinking about Tommy. The moisture in his eyes glistened as he reflected further. "Life has been difficult for the boy. He lost his parents, his sister, and then his grandmother. One of the boys at school makes fun of him because his prosthesis causes him to walk with a limp. A few kids resent him because he lives according to old-fashioned virtues such as compassion, honesty, and kindness."

Gramps yawned and realized that it was getting late. He glanced at the pocket watch that had been his father's, and he decided to turn in for the night. Gramps got up, walked to Tommy's bedroom, and opened the door. Shadow got up from his place in front of the fire, and retired to sleep at the foot of Tommy's bed. Before drifting off to sleep Gramps' attention turned once again to his grandson. "Tommy is a survivor," he thought. "He will overcome his obstacles and will eventually find a place in life where he can shine."