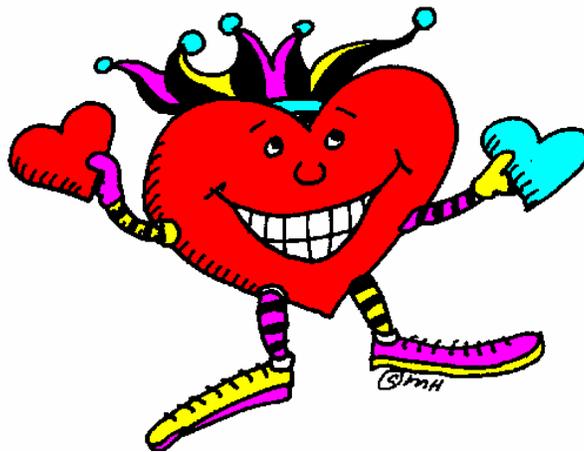


“The Adventures of Nadesh & Petra”
A children’s story

Taken from

The Democracy Book



By

Jerry Dean Epps, Ph. D

“The Adventures of Nadesh and Petra”

Chapter 1



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“People like to live in a democracy”

“Are you awake?” whispered Nadesh to his sister, Petra.

“Yes,” she whispered back from her makeshift bed on the grain sack on the floor of the ship’s cargo hold. “This grain bag is so hard I can’t get to sleep.”

They had been sleeping on these grain bags for 3 weeks now, ever since the old captain had stopped the mean crew from beating them up the night they were kidnapped.

“Nadesh, will we ever see mother and father again?” They had not seen their parents since the pirates had raided their seaside village. The pirates had burned their house to the ground. Nadesh and his sister, Petra, had been dragged off into the night and finally on board this ship. They could scarcely remember when life had been normal. But at least they were alive. The old pirate captain was not really kind to them, but he did keep a protective eye on them during the day. At night he locked them in the cargo hold for their own safety. That way the crew could not bother them.

“No, I don’t think we will see them again,” he said softly. There was silence as they wiped tears from their eyes. Then, on a brighter note, Nadesh spoke again. “I overheard the old captain talking to the first mate just after dinner.”

“Is that the one with the eye patch ... and he keeps that dagger in his belt?” she asked.

“Yeah, that’s the one. But I heard the captain tell him they are going to put us ashore in the morning. They said the place is called Big Tree Land.”

“I’ll be glad to get out of here,” Petra said. “But why that place? They could have dumped us anywhere.”

“Well,” said Nadesh, “the captain said we would have a chance to survive there. He said the people would treat us ok—because the place is a democracy.”

“So what is so great about a de... de...de-moc...ra..ra..cy?” asked Petra.

“Well, the captain said he had always heard that people like living in a democracy. I guess he figures that will keep us safe without having to be locked up in a cargo hold every night,” Nadesh said.

“I sure hope he’s right,” Petra said. They fell silent. And then they fell asleep.

Meanwhile, on the deck above, the captain was steering straight for the cove at Big Tree Land. He planned to put them ashore just at sun up and be on his way before anyone there could ask any questions!

Chapter 2



“All people are equal”

And sure enough, no questions were asked because no one was there at all! The place looked deserted. And before they knew it, they were alone on shore and the captain, ship and crew were gone. It was good to be out of that smelly cargo hold, but now, standing here alone, it felt scary.

“Look Nadesh,” exclaimed Petra, “there is big house over there, and smoke is coming out of the chimney. Maybe they are cooking breakfast.”

They were both hungry. But would the people in the house think it strange that two children showed up at daybreak asking for food. Besides that, their clothes were torn and dirty. They looked a mess. No doubt people would make fun of them. If they had not been so hungry, they would not have taken the risk.

“They’ll probably think they are better than us!” said Nadesh. But they walked toward the house. As they got closer they could smell food cooking. Someone was going to be having breakfast, but would they get any?

And then there were at the front door. They knocked. Right away the door was opened by a large woman with dark skin and jewelry all over her! They could have just stared at this strange looking woman, but there was no time. She motioned them to come right on in. She stood back a minute and took a good look at them.

“The kitchen is this way,” she ordered, “follow me!”

There were all kinds of people in the kitchen! There were big ones, little ones, fat ones and skinny ones. They were just sitting there as if they didn’t know they were the oddest assortment of people on the face of the earth. They were all eating. It was as if Nadesh and Petra had stumbled upon a circus at mealtime! But the dark skinned lady with all the jewelry acted kindly. She kept urging everyone to have more of this and more of that. She seemed intent on making sure each one had plenty to eat.

By now Petra and Nadesh had plates in their hands too and were enjoying eating. These folks really knew how to cook! Then the jewelry lady rapped her knuckles loudly on the table. Most everyone stopped eating or talking and looked her direction.

“Ok, you know how it is around here. Nobody gets a free ride. And nobody bosses anybody around. I own the place and you are welcome to sleep here and eat here as long as you do your part and don’t make trouble.” She continued on, “We have two new people here. And of course they will help with the work just like everyone else—that is, if they are staying.” She turned quickly to them.

“You got anyplace to go? Do you want to stay here?”

Nadesh and Petra were caught off guard. They stood speechless as if the cat had got their tongues. All they could do was stare; first at each other, then at her.

“Ok, they are staying,” announced the lady. “Everyone works here, so I want some of you to show these two chores they can do.” She turned to Nadesh and Petra again, “I’ll be gone for awhile, but don’t worry; my friends here will treat you well. I’m going to the shop in the village—do you need anything?” They stayed silent. The lady left.

Soon they were doing chores just like the others. There were floors to be cleaned, dishes to be washed, trash to be burned and beds to be made. No one was excused from the work. Nadesh remembered again that the captain had said Big Tree Land was a democracy. Maybe this house was like a little democracy inside the larger democracy of Big Tree Land. “Yes”, he thought to himself, “I bet that in a democracy everyone is equal—that is how it here. They didn’t make fun of us, and they are treating us just they treat each other. And nobody gets out of the work” There seemed to be no slaves and no masters here—all seemed equal.

The work continued on all morning.

Chapter 3



“Every person is important

Finally lunchtime came. The lady was back from the village. Everyone helped make the sandwiches and stir the soup and make the drink. Lunch tasted almost as good as breakfast. Then the lady took them outside. They sat down under a tree in the front yard. The look on her face was sort of serious—like she was thinking of something important. After a pause she spoke.

“You two kids are important. Everyone here is important. Do you know why I say that?” she asked. They didn’t.

“Well,” she continued, “I was raised to think that everyone is important. Everyone is human, everyone has feelings, and everyone has something to offer to the group. That’s because everyone is different. Kind of like no two snowflakes are alike. Mother Nature made each one a little different than the other. We have Mr. Wilson A. Bentley to thank for teaching us that. Well, it’s the same with people—no two are alike. It is the differences that make life interesting. So, everyone is important because he or she has something different to offer than what the next person has to offer.” She seemed to be done talking. So that was it! She brought them out here just to tell them that everyone is important! But then she started up again.

Chapter 4:



“If you don’t hurt others you can do what you want.”

“Are you going to tell me why you kids are all alone, with no parents?” So they told her their story. They told about having their village raided and the pirates burning down their house. They told about being dragged to the ship and being locked in the cargo hold at night. They even told about how scared they were walking up to her house and how they could smell breakfast cooking inside.

“We were glad you turned out to be so nice,” Petra offered. “I wish we could see our parents again ... but I don’t think we ever will,” she added in tiny and far away sounding voice.

“I don’t think so either,” added Nadesh. “I hate the captain and his crew of pirates! They had no right to burn us out and then steal us! And what’s worse,” he added, “our parents are probably gone for good.”

Feeling her anger too, Petra jumped in, “And I hate how they kept saying, ‘we can do anything we want!’ and they knew we couldn’t do anything about it. We’re just kids!”

“I feel angry at those mean pirates too,” said the jewelry lady. “By the way, my name is Elena, and I can tell by now that you are Nadesh and Petra.” There was a long silence. Then Elena spoke again. “We live in a democracy here in Big Tree Land. And that means people can do whatever they want—that is, and mark my words well—so long as they don’t hurt others! It has always been like that. Do what ever you want, just so it does not hurt others! And those pirates, who burned your house, did bad things to your parents and stole you—well, they were hurting others and that made it wrong!” Elena seemed really upset with the mean pirates. “They better never show their face around here. We’ve got laws and we know what to do to people who break the law! Those pirates aren’t fit to live in a democracy.”

While it didn’t undo the past, it felt good to Petra and Nadesh to have their new friend, Elena, be on their side. It sure felt like if those pirates ever showed up in Big Tree Land they would have a lot of explaining to do.

Chapter 5



“We decide things by vote”

“Ok, come along now,” Elena said, “we have some decisions to make, and we’ll make them right after supper.” They followed her back into house and then got busy with the others on the afternoon chores. Petra wondered as she worked that afternoon what decisions had to be made, if it involved her and Nadesh and how would the decisions be made. She had visions of Nadesh having to arm wrestle the other boys to see if the two of them could win the right to stay here and live at Elena’s. Then she had other images in her head. Maybe they would be asked to draw straws to see if they got to stay—you know, short straw loses, long straw wins. But, she would just have to wait and see. But when the afternoon’s work was done and the evening meal out of the way, Petra was in for a surprise. Elena announced that it was time to decide if the group would let Nadesh and Petra stay for a long time, or just let them rest up a few days and then send them on their way. But the big surprise was that Petra saw no straws at all and no one was preparing to arm wrestle. Instead it was quite civilized. Here is what happened.

Elena simply said, “Let’s vote. All in favor of letting them stay a long time raise your right hand.” Almost everyone held up their hand! Wow! Marvelous! Whether or not they stayed had simply been put to a vote—and they won!

“That’s it, we ... we...get...to stay...?” stammered Nadesh. He looked shocked and happy all at once.

“Yes,” Elena said. “That’s how we decide things in a democracy, and Big Tree Land is a democracy you know.” She grinned. “We voted and it passed. You’ve won! You can stay!”

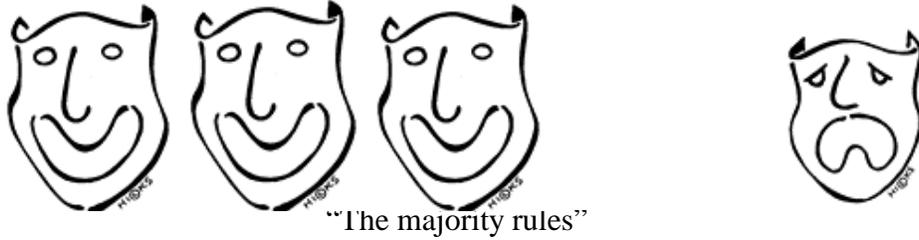
Chapter 6



“One vote for EACH person”

“I even voted for you twice,” teased Nat, “so you know I wanted you to stay.” But Petra and Nadesh knew that wasn’t really possible. It was clear that each person got just one vote, it did not matter who they were. It didn’t make any difference if you did important chores or simple ones, or how long you had been here. Being more experienced, or more popular, didn’t seem to make any difference here when it came to voting. If you were rich, you got one vote. If you were poor, you got one vote. If you were male, you got one vote. If you were female, you got one vote. One person, one vote - that was how it was.

Chapter 7



But Nadesh had noticed that not everyone voted for them to stay. There were three people in the back corner who voted against their staying. “Strange,” he mused, “that they sort of hid in the corner like that.” At least their vote did not make he and Petra have to leave. Everyone knew, or so it seemed, that you didn’t need all the votes, you just had to get most of them. Elena had said, what really mattered was having a “majority” vote. That meant that the ones with the biggest bunch wins.

Nadesh thought on, “even if a few of them don’t want us to stay, they don’t get to ruin it for all those who do want us stay.” Somehow that seemed fair to him—that a few could not hold up the action that all the rest wanted. “I’m glad we got a majority vote on our staying,” he said aloud. “Because, we don’t have any other place to go!”

Chapter 8



“EVERYONE has to obey laws passed by majority vote”

They were not done yet with the three who had voted against them—the ones that sort of hid in the corner. A few days later one of them, the girl named Tami, approached Petra.

“So you’re still here I see,” Tami said. “There is not really room enough for you. It crowds us to have to make room for you.”

Petra saw that this girl, Tami, was not going to be friendly. Obviously Tami did not want Petra and Nadesh to stay. Petra was not eager to make enemies, but felt she had as much right as Tami to be living here in Elena’s big house. She looked Tami right in the eye, “Well, we won the majority vote so we are staying and there is nothing you can do about it!”

“Yeah, I know,” stormed Tami. “I know we have to go along with the vote cause we lost. But don’t you go thinking everyone here likes you because me and my friends don’t!” Tami turned and walked away. Petra felt her face flush. She was hot with anger! She was so mad at Tami! But she was also glad about all this democracy stuff. Because it was a democracy, even those who didn’t like how the vote turned out still had to go along with it. She was really grateful for this part of living in a democracy. But she still did not like Tami. Nothing in a democracy said you had to like everybody! Just to make the point, she too turned and marched off—with her head held high!

Chapter 9



“Law makers and managers are ELECTED by ALL of the people”

Things went well for the next several days. Neither Petra nor Nadesh had much contact with the three who had voted against them. Those three kept to themselves. Everyone worked during the daytime and had free time at night. That was after the evening meal was finished and, of course, the kitchen cleaned. Nadesh liked it best when they gathered in the yard and played games. He missed his home village, but at least here there were enough children here to play with to make it fun. His favorite game was hide and seek.

One night while playing hide and seek Edward said Nadesh was cheating! It was hard to see how Edward could call it cheating because it was the same game they had been played for a few days now.

What Nadesh usually did was keep hiding until he saw a chance to make it to base before the seeker could count him out. Counting out was done by slapping the object they were using for base 3 times as one yelled out, for example, “one, two, three on Petra.” If the yell was completed before Petra touched the base she was considered “caught.” The goal of course was to not get caught. Tonight Edward was saying Nadesh had to touch the base BEFORE Edward started the yell! This seemed wrong to Nadesh and he thought Edward was being unfair.

He was about to punch Edward in the nose when Elena appeared from out of nowhere.

“Well, well,” she began, “I see we have a dispute over how the games are to be run. We need to do something to clear up this mess or we’ll have to stop the games all together! Games are for fun, not for making trouble.” Everyone had stopped playing and was listening to her. She seemed very serious!

“What shall we do?” asked Petra.

“Looks to me like you need some lawmakers and maybe even some managers too,” replied Elena.

“What’s the difference between lawmakers and managers?” someone asked.

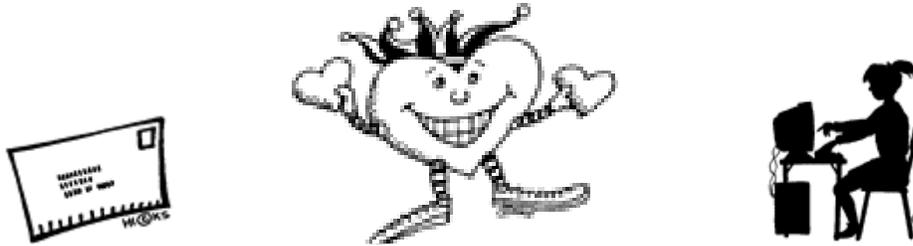
Elena seemed ready with the answer. “The lawmakers talk it over among themselves—you know, see what is fair for everyone involved—and then set down some rules or laws. Sometimes kids call them rules, but we can call them laws. After the lawmakers have

had plenty of time to discuss what is best, they vote. They have to get a majority of course. Then all players will have to obey these laws.” That seemed clear enough.

“But what do managers do?” someone else asked.

“Oh, that’s easy. They just see to things. They get out whatever is needed for the games, make sure someone is there to be the referee in case of disputes and stuff like that. The lawmakers made the laws but the managers see to it that the laws are actually followed. They are in charge of keeping things organized.” With that, Elena turned and went back into the house. It sort of went without saying that there would need to be an election of lawmakers and managers before any more evening games would be played.

Chapter 10



“Good lawmakers and managers care about the people.
They want to hear from the people”

There was a lot of talk about who to elect to be law makers. They knew the decision would be by vote, and they had to have a majority to win, but who? For the next couple of days that was all people talked about. Nadesh was in favor of his friend, Sandesh. Petra on the other hand thought Denetra would be a good law maker. It was truly amazing how many different opinions there were. It appeared there would be no easy agreement—there were so many different ideas! A few even wanted to vote to have no laws at all. But most could see that laws actually make it fairer for everyone. A lot of fights would break out and a lot of time wasted if there were no laws or rules. Elena had said that ...an...ark...ee, or some big word like that, usually was not helpful. She clearly agreed there must be laws and some managers to make sure the laws were obeyed and things ran smoothly.

Peter said he wanted the kids to elect him to be a law maker. Petra asked him why. At least he was honest when he replied, “Then I could set things up just the way I like them. I might even make people pay me a tax before they can play in the games each day.” He was grinning real big. He thought he could make himself rich.

Nadesh had overheard Peter and Nadesh was upset!

“You selfish thief,” he yelled. “We will not have bribes here—just clean, straight ways of dealing.” He gave a huge sigh. “Everybody knows lawmakers are not supposed to use their position to feather their own nests!”

Peter’s mouth dropped open. He seemed shocked! And Nadesh wasn’t finished yet.

“That is what is wrong in the world. Some people just try to grab riches and power for themselves! Don’t you know that rule makers are supposed to look out for ALL of the people?! They can’t just look out for themselves or the whole system falls apart.” He paused for a breath and then continued, “It is supposed to be an honor to SERVE the others. It is a chance to help everyone, not a chance to just help you. We don’t want to elect thieves; we want to elect public servants.” There, he felt better now. He was tired of mean people hurting others. Especially when they held positions of power and they used those positions to do things that were not honorable.

Peter just walked away with his head down. He never mentioned wanting to be elected a law maker again.

When it came time for the election it was actually quite simple. After all the talking of who would run for the positions of law makers and also for the manager positions, only a few actually wanted to try it. Nadesh was elected to be one of the law makers and Petra was elected to be one of the managers. The evening games started up again a few days later. The law makers had met and ironed out the rules. Then the managers met and got everything organized. There were almost no fights over the rules. When there was a disagreement it was usually solved quickly by the managers. Things were running pretty smooth.

Chapter 11:



meet in groups



vote



seek happiness



free speech

“Basic rights can not be taken away.”

But the smoothness did not last forever. About 5 weeks after the evening games had started again trouble sprang up. It was one of those kids who had voted against having Nadesh and Petra stay when they first arrived at Elena’s. It had seemed strange at the time that they hid in the corner, and were never very nice to either of them, especially Petra. It was one of them—the boy that seemed to be always looking for trouble. One day he did a mean thing, or at least Petra, and several others, thought so. All the day’s chores were done and evening games were about to start.

The one always looking for trouble strode forward and announced in a loud voice, “I say we don’t let the trash play in our games!” A few kids smiled like they were in on his mean secret, but all the others had no idea what he meant.

“What are you talking about?” someone asked.

“I’ll tell what I talking about.” He was smiling, but it definitely was not a friendly smile. “I’m talking about letting that crippled girl play in our games—you know, rolling around in her wheel chair. I say we vote her out.” But he had even more meanness in him, because he was speaking again, “and while we are getting rid of trash let’s vote out that stupid boy with the real crooked teeth too!”

For a moment no one spoke. Most of them were angry with his words, but they were also afraid. He often pushed kids at mealtime or liked to trip the smaller kids when they were running on the playground. Yes, some of them were definitely afraid. Maybe they would be silent and go along with the mean plan he and his friends had cooked up. That way, maybe he wouldn’t hurt them.

But the next voice was Elena's. How did she always know to show up at the right time? She looked right at the small group of kids who had cooked up the mean plan.

"Democracy is supposed to benefit ALL of the people. And because some people are not good, a principle was created in democracy to take care of the trouble that bullies like to make."

Some of the group who had been supporting the mean boy started to edge away from him. The rest of the kids were glad Elena knew of a democracy principle to handle this situation because they could feel it was wrong. She continued.

"Most things are determined by majority vote. But not everything can be done, or not done, by majority vote. For instance, it is not possible to exclude someone from the games because they have a physical disability. Even if it should pass a majority vote, it would not be allowed in a democracy. Nor can you exclude someone because they have an unusual appearance. That won't be allowed in a democracy either."

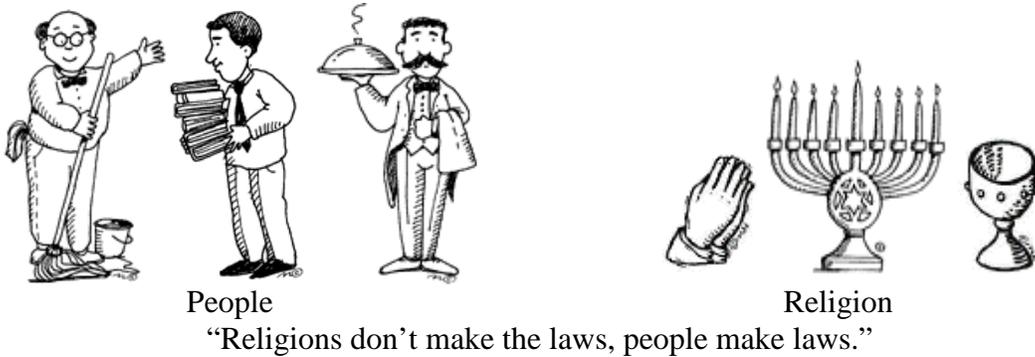
There was a silence, then someone called, "Elena, does that mean that there is no way we can vote people out of the games just because we don't like them?"

"That is exactly what it means," she said. "You see, in a democracy we value individual rights. Some rights are so special that we won't let even a majority vote take those rights away from the people being picked on. This special group of rights is usually about not letting people get hurt in some way by others. The point is, even a majority vote can't

make it ok to hurt people who aren't powerful enough to protect themselves." Then she was quiet, and the kids noticed that she wiped a tear from her eye. She walked away, then paused and turned back to face the kids.

"I guess I can say it best like this: democracy tries hard to make sure the bullies don't get to call the shots." Then she started again toward the house and did not turn back to say anything else. As the kids turned back to look around at their own group they did not see the mean boy anywhere. He had slipped away when no one was looking.

Chapter 12



It was several days after that when the religious officials showed up. No one knew for sure who had invited them. They put on a wonderful religious service with singing, bells, prayers and stories. Most of the children loved the service. Petra was very impressed with the religious officials and said so.

“I just loved your service,” she told one official. “I hope you will come again.”

“I think we will,” the official replied. “Elena invited us to come again next week.”

Time passed quickly and soon it was next week, and, sure enough, the religious people came back. And again, the service was lovely. Most really seemed to like it. But then a strange thing happened. Here is how it came about.

The headman among the religious officials made an announcement. He had not cleared it with Elena because she never would have allowed it. Here is what he said.

“We religious leaders know what is good for adults and for you kids too. We have studied religious topics for years and we pray to the Creator a lot, so we know what is right. We have made a list of laws for you to use when you work and play. When we come back next week we will give rewards to those who have obeyed our laws and punish those who did not obey our laws.” He stood there smiling, waiting for the children to clap showing their approval. No one clapped. He stopped smiling.

“Come now,” he said, “surely you know that you can not live by your laws. Surely you know that we religious leaders have the right to tell people what they should do.” By now most of the children were frowning, and Elena was standing on the sideline, but was smiling. It seemed the more the kids frowned, the bigger her smile grew! The religious leader went on, “I understand that you practice democracy here and that is ok—well, I mean it is ok up to a point. But there comes a time when democracy must stop. It must bow to religion when it comes to saying what people can and can not do!”

Then Elena strode to the front of the group. She stood right beside the man who had been speaking. “Since we are a democracy, let’s vote. How many of you want to give your rights over to the religious leaders and how many of you want to keep your rights? Come on; hold up your hands if you want to keep your rights.” Nadesh, as he held up his hand, looked about the group. Almost every hand went up. My, my, what a big smile was on Elena’s face. She turned to the religious leader.

“Thank you for coming, but please don’t come back. Good day to you.” And with that the group of religious leaders packed up and left. Elena spoke to the group. “Don’t worry; we will continue to have religious services. But we will find a religion that supports democracy. We will find a religion that gives us a religious experience but does not tell us what laws we have to live by. For that, we have our elected law makers and elected managers.” Then she added, “Don’t misunderstand me, I value religious experience very much. It’s just that in a democracy religious leaders cannot over ride the decisions of the elected lawmakers and managers, who are responsible to the people who elected them.”

The very next week there was a different religious group there to put on the services. The leader started out by saying, “we believe in democracy—people must have self rule. We will offer a religious experience for your lives, which you are free, of course, to use or not use, as you desire.”

Chapter 13



“No one can tell you what religion to practice.”

For many weeks in a row a different religious group came each week. They each said about the same thing. “People deserve self rule. We offer you a religious experience. You are free to accept it or reject it. That is your right when it comes to religion. You get to choose what religion you want. You can practice it as you like, so long as it does not go against the laws the lawmakers have made—the lawmakers that you elected in a democratic way.”

One day Petra and her friend were talking. “So, is it settled then, this religious thing?” asked her friend.

“I think so,” Petra answered. “I think it’s like this: In a democracy, only the people, by vote, can say what law for the group is. Religions can not do that. They can have customs that their followers practice, but that is what they are, customs, and not legal laws that all must obey.” She felt rather good about having it figured out.

But then she remembered something, “Oh yes, and each person gets to choose his or her own religion—the one they want to follow. That right cannot be voted away, even by a majority vote!” That last part was important to her, because even she and her brother, Nadesh, had chosen different groups to attend and she wanted each of them to have that right.

Chapter 14



Just when the question about the role of religion in a democracy was settled someone else tried to take over the democratic way of life the kids were enjoying. This time it was the military. Well, not the real military. You know, not adults with guns and bullets. It was some of the managers. A group of them had been appointed to make sure the games were played by the rules. They started wearing uniforms and many of them had started marching about, saluting and being saluted by their officers. They were starting to act as if they were more important than the other kids. Some of them had begun carrying clubs so they could threaten the other kids with them.

There was one incident that was particularly bad. Three boys who were really into the military thing started waving their clubs at another boy. He refused to let them push him around. They demanded he give them bribe money—he refused. They struck him with their fists, then with their clubs! They beat him up real bad. Then they bragged about it to some other kids, but Nadesh overheard them bragging. He knew it was time to do something about these military boys.

Nadesh called a meeting to discuss the situation. There was a lot of excitement in the air and everyone came to the meeting. Everyone except the boy who was beaten up. He was in bed trying to get better. The military boys were not looking so mean now as they sat stoop shouldered on a bench way back in the room. They mostly looked at the floor.

The first complaint was delivered by Petra. “So what are we going to do!? I think it is just awful that the people who are supposed to help us have started hurting us!” She sat down.

Then her friend, Marcela, stood up. “These military boys have taken on power we did not give them. I say we strip them of their power. No more uniforms, no more clubs and not more saluting!” She sat down amidst cheers, clapping and calls like, “no more clubs!” and “no more bribes!” and so on.

Nadesh spoke next. “We need order—that is what managers are for, to help us have order and see to it that things run smoothly. But these guys got out of hand. They turned into thugs, and stopped acting as managers who serve the group. They were more concerned with having power and pushing people around than they were about helping.”

Several people gasped and a shiver of excitement ran through the crowd, as one of the military boys at the back was standing up to speak. Oh no, what would he say! But when he spoke, it surprised everyone.

“What we did was wrong. I admit it now. I loved getting to wear a uniform and have people fear me. I took money from several kids in exchange for favors. All I had to do was touch my club and they did what I said. But it was wrong, and ... and ... I’m sorry.” He was wiping tears from his eyes now. But he continued to speak. “You say you need order and I agree. But a simple colored arm band, or certain color of cap would be enough to let people know who the managers are during games and so on. We don’t need these uniforms and we sure don’t need these clubs. Oh yes, and taking money should be stopped at once. No more bribes!” Then he sat down. The other military boys were still looking at the floor, but Sergio, the one who had just spoke, was now looking at people. He was no longer looking down.

Elena had suddenly appeared and walked over to stand by Sergio, with an arm around his shoulder. She was smiling and he was starting to smile. Someone said the law makers should meet and make very clear laws about how any military like positions would operate. The military people would have to do exactly as the elected law makers said. After all, the voters are the bosses, not the military!

But Nadesh knew it would be important to have close supervision of the military positions or they could get out of hand again. He was thinking so hard that he actually said aloud, “The regular people are in charge of the military and not the other way around.” Then he looked around and could see that only a few had heard him. But he knew he would be saying it for others to hear, over and over again. When people have freedom they won’t tolerate being pushed around by the military! This he knew.

Chapter 15



Elected Representatives
“Law makers serve at the pleasure of the people”

The next day an interesting thing happened. Someone grabbed Nadesh’s arm and started excitedly pulling him toward the barn at the back of the property.

“We just found these!” he panted, out of breath. “Don’t know how long they’ve been there!”

“Don’t know how long WHAT has been there?!” Nadesh demanded.

“You’ll see—hurry up, come on now!” That was all the answer he got. So he ran along to the barn. By the time he got there the other boy was already headed up the ladder to the hay mow. Nadesh could hear other kids already up there.

When he got to the top someone thrust a paper in his hand. And there it was. This was the cause of all the commotion. He could hardly believe his own eyes! He was staring at a set of laws the military boys had planned to put into effect.

“I’ll read them, you are too stunned,” said Janice. And she took the paper and started to read. The first one said.

“All citizens will obey the military or be subject to punishment.” She read on, about how the people had to pay taxes directly to the military, and so on. But Nadesh was only half hearing. He just couldn’t believe it! How could some people be so wrong, so mean...as to think they had a right to tell others how to live? But then he heard someone say,

“We should have had the religious leaders make the laws; at least they were nicer and didn’t want to treat us so bad!” This made Nadesh really furious!

“Don’t you get it?!” he bellowed! “We live in a democracy, WE, us, you and me. We make the laws—through our elected lawmakers. WE the people are in charge of ourselves! We don’t need the religious leaders, the rich or the military or anyone else to make laws for us. ONLY THOSE WE ELECT GET TO MAKE LAWS THAT WE

HAVE TO LIVE BY!” He took a few seconds to catch his breath. He calmed down a bit. “We can have a group meeting and re-explain this to everyone. Then we can build a fire and burn up these false laws, these laws that are not real because they were not made by elected lawmakers. We ARE a democracy!”

They quietly climbed down the ladder and left the barn. That night they had the meeting and it was clear in everyone’s mind that in a democracy the ONLY people who can make laws are those who the people elect. They burned the false laws in the fire.

At Petra’s suggestion, they went around the fire and each one there said why he or she liked living in a democracy. They each gave different reasons, but in the end, the reasons were about being free, getting to live how I want to and not how someone else wants me to. As they left the fire that night Petra was thinking, “I think democracy is just natural for everyone in the world because everyone in the world wants to be free.”

Thinking that made her feel good all over. Wow! How wonderful! All the world living in a democracy and enjoying freedom! She smiled all the way to her bed and was still smiling when she fell asleep.

Chapter 16



“Private groups can have special practices if they are not against the law”

The time at Elena’s had passed quickly and soon it would be one year since Petra and Nadesh had been put ashore in Big Tree Land by the old Captain. It had been a good year. So much had happened. Things like being voted to get to stay, finding a religion she liked and a religion that also knew democracy was a good thing. And she was happy to have her friends.

But it had been a hard year too. She would never see her parents again. She knew they were dead. But she was not alone in this. Of course she had Nadesh, but Petra also discovered that a few other kids knew their parents were dead too. Most of the kids at Elena’s expected to have their parents return for them eventually. But for those who knew their parents had died there was a strange thing. They all felt the same way about it. On the one hand they were very sad that their parents were dead. But on the other hand they knew their parents would be happy that their children were living in freedom, living in a democracy.

Sahara said it like this. “Oh how I wish I could have Mommy and Daddy back again, but I know they had always hoped that someday I would be able to grow up in freedom, and now I am. I just wish they could be here to live in freedom too. But I am happy to be making their dream come true—the dream that one day I would live and grow up in a democracy and get to be free every day!” The handful of kids who knew their parents were dead all felt the same. They felt like Sahara did. They were fulfilling the dream of their parents—the dream of living in a democracy.

One day Sahara had an idea. She shared it with Petra.

“Let’s do this to honor our parents—the parents we no longer have. Let’s tell all the kids whose parents are dead to wear yellow arm bands one day a week. We can be the yellow arm band club. It will show we still think of them AND, it will show that we are happy to be living in freedom.” She stopped to see how Petra liked her idea. Petra was smiling. Petra liked it.

“Sahara, that is a great idea! It will be a club for honoring our parents who have died and at the same time, show that we are happy to live in a democracy. I like it.”

Sahara added, “But this club is only for those kids whose parents are dead.” Petra agreed. They needed a special little club just for them. A club where they understood how each other felt.

After the idea had been discussed among those whose parents had died, it was agreed.

“Ok,” said Petra, “every Tuesday we will wear our yellow arm bands. We should encourage each one in our group to do it. Let’s get 100% on this!”

Some kids did not like it that they were not invited to wear yellow arm bands on Tuesdays. They knew their parents would come back someday, but they wanted to be a part of the new practice that said—“if your parents are dead, and you love democracy, wear a yellow arm band on Tuesdays.” One person even said he thought it was against democracy to have a special practice that was not passed by the voters. There was a lot of talk about it.

But after a heated discussion one day before lunch, Nadesh set the record straight. He felt strongly about this and you could tell it by his loud voice. “This practice does not go against the written laws that our elected law makers have made. So that part is ok. And secondly, people in the club are strongly encouraged to wear the arm bands, but they don’t have to. They don’t violate the legal laws if they don’t wear them. You can’t put anybody in jail if they refuse to wear one. So, there it is! It is not against the law TO WEAR one and the law can not do anything to you if you DO NOT WEAR one!” Then in a more regular voice he added, “The point is, special groups can have special practices they don’t violate the law of the land.”

Chapter 17:



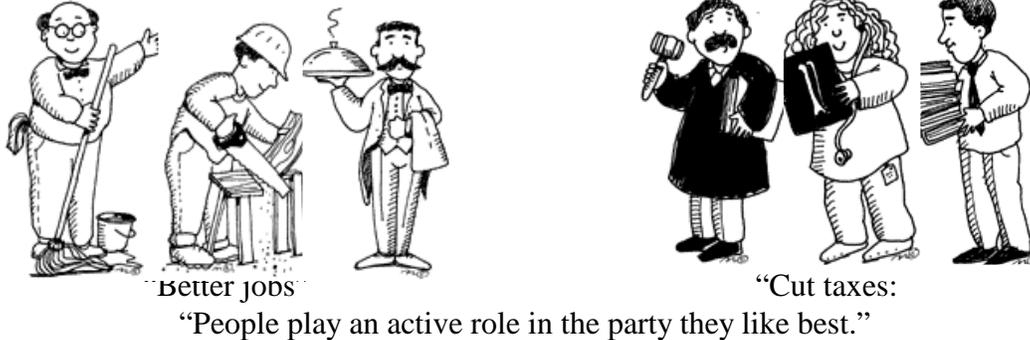
“Judges makes sure society is run by the law of the land”

Most everyone was ok with the yellow arm band practice after that. But, not everyone. One of the kids, Ramon, whose parents were dead, said that honoring dead parents was so important that there should be a law requiring people with dead parents to wear the yellow arm bands on Tuesdays. He tried to get the law makers to say a kid, whose parents were dead, would be locked in his or her room for a full day if they did not wear the arm band on a Tuesday. But the law makers did not buy it. They knew that would be against the laws already set up. For sure it would violate the “you can do what you want as long as it doesn’t hurt others” law. It would probably be against other laws too. But Ramon still was not satisfied so he took his case to court. He said he would make trouble for those who did not wear the arm bands when he thought they should. He was sure he was right. Ramon wanted the court to agree with him. Court was made up of people elected to say what a law really means when there is a disagreement about what it means. Sometimes managers want to say a law means one thing and different managers, or even just ordinary people, may want to say it means something else. So the court was set up, with judges, to say what the law really means. The decisions of the judges are important and people have to go by their decisions. Judges look at the law very carefully and then say what it means.

The judge said, “Ramon, you can’t force people to wear yellow arm bands. That would be against the law. The wearing of arm bands is a voluntary practice. It may be a good idea, but it is not law.”

He went on to tell Ramon to stop making trouble for those who did not want to wear the arm bands. Ramon seemed unhappy for days after the judge told him that his idea was not legal. He lost his case in court and he did not like that. But he knew the judges were the boss when it was a question of what does the law mean. Finally, by the time of Elena’s birthday party Ramon seemed ok again.

Chapter 18



Partly why Ramon seemed ok again was because he was heading up the Tell It Like It Is political party. The party idea was that it is good for people to speak when they think they have been wronged. Ramon loved being a leader and speaking out for what he believed. He complained a lot about the yellow arm bands issue. Some felt he just liked to complain. Several others who liked to complain joined the political party. This political party felt that “being brave enough to speak out” was a good thing. Others felt the Tell Like It Is party was not brave at all. They felt like it was really for people who like to complain. However, like most political parties, Ramon and his friends made signs, held meetings and did everything they could to get more kids to join with them. It was when Nadesh and Petra saw it was growing that they decided to do something. They gathered their friends.

Petra started. “The Tell It Like It Is party likes to complain!” She continued, “All they do is say what is wrong. They never have solutions. We need a political party that has solutions!” The group around her clapped their hands.

“Let’s call it the Solutions party,” suggested Nadesh. “Sure, it is ok to complain sometimes, but it is always better to come up with a solution. You can’t fix the world with complaints!”

“Maybe this could be our slogan,” Sahara said. “Solutions Save the Day.”

The group liked it. The party members got real involved in meetings, sign making, making speeches and doing whatever they could to see to it their ideas got accepted on voting day. The competition was intense as the two parties each tried to get people to support their ideas.

“I had no idea people would work so hard in the political party,” Nadesh said to Petra one day. “They really want their ideas to win, don’t they?”

“I think so,” Petra replied. “They see that working hard in the political party is their best chance of getting their ideas accepted. Most of our members won’t win a position in government. Working at the party level is their best chance to get heard.”

“Come on! Let’s get back to work,” scolded Sahara, “We don’t want them to get ahead of us! Remember, if they win, we have to live with their ideas.” Back to work they went. They so hoped their political party would win. Of course, the other party felt just as strongly and wanted their ideas to win. Both sides played fair. Both sides played hard. Both sides wanted to win!

Chapter 19, conclusion of story

But by the time Elena’s birthday arrived both political parties were ready for a rest. They needed a break from the intense campaign. They agreed to stop the campaign for 1 week and focus on a different kind of party—Elena’s birthday party. And what a party it was! So much good food to eat. And many people got all dressed up for the event.

It was doubly special for Nadesh and Petra because they had now been here for more than a year. The sandwiches were very good. After his second one, Nadesh thought of the captain and the pirates who had killed their parents and been so mean to them. That was a long time ago, he thought. It was hard to keep track of all that had happened to he and Petra. What a year! Some of it had been very bad. And yet, a lot of it had turned out to be very good.

“What are you thinking about?” Petra asked him.

“Well,” replied Nadesh, “I was just thinking of how mean the captain and his pirates were to us. And then all the other stuff that has happened. But you know what, Petra, at least the ‘ole captain was right about one thing.”

Petra asked, “what was that?”

Nadesh replied. “It doesn’t make it right, what he did to our parents, and us, but I think he was right when I overheard him talking that night to the first mate. One of the things he said was that people like living in a democracy. Remember, that is why he was bringing us here.”

“I guess you are right,” Petra said. “I know I like living in a democracy. And from what I can see, everyone else does too.”

THE END