

**HERKIMER  
GOES TO  
WASHINGTON:  
IN SEARCH OF HIS FREEDOM**

**BY RICHARD LANNON**

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A few years later. Somewhere in Upstate New York. In a small town called Hope Falls. Where a huge tree named Freedom doesn't stand any more.

Nothing much has changed in Hope Falls except the For Sale sign. It's attached to the white picket fence. A fence that separates the road from Herkimer Diamonds property. Herkimer it seems has fallen on hard times. He never recovered from the loss of his Freedom. Now Herk must sell his property and move into town in order to make ends meet.

Herk is digging a hole in the hot sun. The sweat is running off Herks face down onto his shirt. His shirt is ringing wet. The hole that Herk is digging is going to be the new home of Liberty. Liberty is the child of Freedom. Herk feels that Liberty would be best suited closer to the farm house.

Liberty has done some growing with the help of Herks nurturing. The tree now stands almost 3 feet tall. Herk sits on the ground next to Liberty. Closes his eye's and tries to visualize what Liberty will look like 20 years from now. He hears a voice from far away. He sits up looks in the direction of the voice but no one is there. Then he hears the voice again, it says.

"Herkimer, Herkimer Diamond." Still no one in sight. Herks eye's followed the direction of the voice.

Then the voice said. "Your tree is in the news ,boy."

A man on a bicycle became visible. It's an elderly man on a bicycle climbing the hill that leads to Herks house. "It's good old Smiley." Herk said to himself.

"Smiley has also gotten older his big hairy gray moustache is now longer. But now due scientific technology. Smiley has a full head of black hair. Smiley had a air transplant a few years back. The story goes Smiley had it done by a man who did hair transplants for a living. It seems Smiley wouldn't sell the property to the man unless he threw in a free hair transplant. He still wears black suspenders, brown pants and a white shirt that still has coffee stains on it. But he sold most of the town of Hope Falls. To the new families moving in. People say Smiley always rides his bike because he's too cheap to buy gas for his car and their right!

Smiley spoke again. "Herkimer your tree is in the news, boy". Smiley finally reached the fence that ran between the road and Herks property.

"Remember those two jerks who stole your Freedom away from you a few years back. Well there's a picture in the National Newspaper of them standing in front of a tree, It looks like your tree!" Smiley Wheezed.

"Here take a look." Smiley wheezed. Smiley took the news paper and shows Herk the front page.

"That's my Freedom". Herk yelled. As the tears flowed from his eye's

It says here that they got the tree from some where in China. Had it shipped to Washington DC. Where it's on display permanently at the Smithsonian. Smiley huffed

"Herk, you want the newspaper?" Question Smiley

"Yea." Herk said.

"Then that will be \$3.00." Smiley said.

Herk was surprised, he thought Smiley was giving him the newspaper but in reality he was charging him for it. Herk reached into his pockets with his hands in search of the money but his pockets were empty. Smiley watched carefully. Herk pulls his hands out of his pockets and hands the newspaper back to Smiley.

"I'm sorry Smiley I don't have any money on me today". Herk said. Looking to the ground. Herk had no money at all that's why he selling the farm.

"That's alright kid you can have the news paper." Smiley said smiling. "I read the paper this morning that's my personnel copy, my new wife, Helga won't miss it, she can't read English anyway. A sturdy stock she is and what a pair of." Smiley stopped himself in mid sentence.

"You know that medicine Viagra is a wonderful thing. A wonderful thing!" Smiley exclaimed as he got on his bike.

"Thank you Smiley." Herk said smiling. Choking back the tears filling his eye's

Smiley turned his bike around looking back at Herk. Smiley saw the tears in Herks eye's and said. "Have a good day Herk. Don't worry kid some how the good guy always wins in the end. "

"Yeee Ha." Smiley yelled. As he rode down the hill.

Herk watched as Smiley went down the hill back to town. He put Liberty in the hole he dug before Smiley showed up. He kneeled down and pushed the black soil all around the roots. Packing the hole with dirt and filling it with water. Then Herk noticed, the maroon haze. It not only covered the horizon. But all the sky around him. The air pollution had gotten a lot worse.

Herk had trouble sleeping that night, the thought of Freedom and the many memories they had together overwhelmed him. Herk kept reading the newspaper article over and over again. The article said, before the tree was cut down at the stump. It was injected with a new chemical that froze all the molecules in the tree. The tree was carefully wrapped with steel cables. That were attached too Three Military Helicopters. They picked up Freedom and transported it to a laboratory. Where the Scientist started growing the roots again.

Herk felt he should some how visit this tree in Washington DC. To see if it was really Freedom not some other tree from China.

“ I need to see my Freedom. I need to wrap my arms around it and give Freedom a big hug.”  
Herk thought.

Herk couldn't figure out how he could afford to go down to Washington. Herk had no money left. Traveling is very expensive. Depressed, Herk walked over to the kitchen cabinet for a cracker. He opened the cabinet reached for the box of crackers. He opened the box and reached inside and found he only had two crackers left. He grabbed them both and shoved them in his mouth. He reached up to close the cabinet door and noticed his last gallon of the Golden Syrup placed way in the back of his cabinet. Herk thought to himself. I wonder if Smiley might want to buy my last gallon of Golden Syrup. If he does, I might have enough money to go to Washington. I'll walk into town tomorrow with it and pay Smiley a visit.

Early the next morning, Herk watered Liberty well. Then gathered his belongings. The walk into town was a long one. But Herk was willing to take that chance. He'd do anything to be with his Freedom again.

Herk entered Smileys General Store. Smiley was standing behind the counter in the back of the room. Herk made his way to the back of the room. The floors were made with wide wood planks they had a shine to them. But they looked dirty anyway. Herk walk towards Smiley passing corn brooms, Mouse traps and tools on display. Smiley was looking down reading a magazine that rested on the counter. As Herk got closer. Smiley raised his head and smiled. Smiley seems to be smiling more often these days. The Town people seem to think, his young new wife has something to do with it.

Smiley spoke. “Well, well, well afternoon Herk. What brings you to town?”

“Good afternoon Smiley.” Herk responded. “ I brought in my last gallon of Golden Syrup. I thought you might like to buy it off me.” Herk said.

“No thanks. I've got ten gallons over there on the shelf.” Smiley who wasn't smiling. Pointed his finger to the shelf where the Golden Syrup was on display. “It doesn't sell anymore, sorry”.

“Thanks anyway”. Herk said as he turned around making his way out of the store. Now Herk really got depressed.

“Wait a minute Herk” Smiley said with a frown. “What do you need the money for?”

“ I'd like to go to Washington and see that tree on display”. Herk mumbled

“Sorry, I can't help you.” Smiley said. Smiley returned to reading his magazine.

Herk again turned around and walked out the door towards home. Thoughts of anger, depression, and never seeing his Freedom again filled his head. He was so deep in thought he couldn't hear a thing.

Then he heard. "Herk. Herkimer". Smiley was standing in the General Store doorway yelling for Herk. "You forgot your Golden Syrup". Yelled Smiley.

Herk again turned around and headed back towards Smiley and the General Store. The gallon of Golden Syrup was all that Herkimer had left his Freedom. He walked back to Smiley with his head down, defeated. Smiley handed the gallon container to Herk.

"Thank You Smiley" Herkimer said, not raising his head.

Again Herk turned around, walking back home. "By the way Herk." Smiley said. "Did you know that the Train Station is having a promotion this week?"

"Who cares." Herk said. Never turning his head back.

"There giving away a free round trip ticket to Washington DC. To any one who puts food in the food pantry basket. That's next to the Ticket Booth in the Train Station." Yelled Smiley.

Herk turned around and looked puzzled at Smiley. "You've got to be kidding me?" Yelled Herk

Smiley is smiling, shaking his head no. "No kidding Herk." Smiley said. "Herk you better hurry the next Train leaves in 40 minutes." Smiley says, while looking at his watch.

Herk starts spiriting towards Smiley and yells to Smiley. "Smiley could you please water Liberty while I'm away?" Herk says. While he runs past Smiley.

"No problem Herk, good luck, be careful and call me when you get in to Washington." Smiley yells. As Smileys head follows Herk as he runs past Smiley on his way to the Train Station. Smiley thought to himself. "I'm getting tired of riding my bike up to Herks place. I think I better put some gas in my car. I hate it when I have to spend my own money. I better go see the Doc. I think I'm getting soft in the head."

Herk entered the Train Station and walked over to the ticket booth. Herk walks up to the man standing behind the glass booth and says. "Excuse me sir, If I put this gallon of Golden Syrup in this basket will that entitle me to a free round trip train ticket?"

"You betcha." Responds the man.

Herk turns to the half empty basket and lowers his last gallon of the Golden Syrup into it. Herk whispers to the Golden Syrup. "Good bye Freedom."

"Now where would you like to go and when." Says the man.

"I'd like to go to Washington DC. please." Herk responded.

"And when would you like to leave?" the man questioned.

"Right now, if it's possible." Herk quickly responded.

"Well let me see when the next train leaves for Washington." The man says. As he checks over the train schedule. "I'm sorry son the last train for Washington leaves gate 5 in 3 minutes your not going to make it."

"Watch me." Herk says. Herk grabs the ticket from the mans hand and starts to run in the direction of gate 5.

The man in the ticket booth yells to Herk. "What so important in Washington?"

"Freedom. I'm going to Washington in search of my Freedom!" Herk Yelled. Never looking back.

"Good luck." The man in the ticket booth said, sarcastically under his breath.

"Alllll Aboard." Yelled the conductor as he climbed up the stairs that led to the train. Herk jumped on to the stairs right behind the conductor. The train started to move slowly at first then gained speed.

The Train ride from Hope Falls to Washington use to take 8 hours. With today's scientific technology it now only takes an hour. Herk was excited about seeing Freedom again. But nervous that the tree might not be his Freedom.

Herk arrived in Washington an hour later. Herk is surprised at how big and dirty Washington is. Walking around, Herk felt a sense of danger. Homeless people on the streets kept coming up to Him asking for money. Poor people were sleeping on park benches mumbling to themselves. Herk found it odd. Here in our great nations capitol, so many poor people lived.

Herk entered the park where all the monuments are. He walk along the Vietnam War Memorial. A wall of names killed in the name of Freedom. Herk looked for his Great Uncle. Who was killed in the Vietnam War. Cut flowers were strewn on the ground in front of the wall. Herk came to his Great Uncles name. He touched the cold marble where the name of Herbert Gott was engraved. Proud that his Great Uncle gave his life in the name of Freedom. Sad he lost his life at such a young age.

As Herk walked through the park he noticed a man standing above a crowd that surrounded him. The man spoke to the crowd. He said. "There is nothing wrong with our Government. It's some of the people who are running it. The people who are running our government are corrupted by money and power." Herk walked past the crowd. He couldn't hear the man speaking anymore. Herk turned his head and saw this huge tree enclosed in an enormous glass green house attached to the Smithsonian building.

"Freedom?" Herk said.

Herk ran to the glass green house. Pressed his face against the glass. So he could Identify the tree. He collapsed to the ground crying hysterical. A man walking past the Smithsonian saw Herk lying on the ground and went to investigate. The man walked up to Herk and touched Herk on the shoulder.

"What's wrong son? Are you lost?" The man asked.

Herk looked into the mans friendly eye's and told him. "I came to Washington looking for a tree that was stolen from me. But that tree in there, is not my Freedom." Herk cried. Pointing his finger at the tree inside the glass house.

The man looked at Herkimer who was sitting on the ground with his back leaning against the foundation of the greenhouse. He felt sorry for Herk. Herks head was covered by his hands as the sobbed into them. The man reach his hand down to Herkimer and said.

" Young man take my hand. I want to show you something." Herk pulled his hands away from his tear soaked face. He reached for the mans hand. The man helped Herk up from the ground.

"My name is Iam. What's yours young man?"

Herk still holding on to Iams hand wiped the tears off his face with his other hand and said. "Herkimer."

"Very interesting." Said Iam. "Have you ever read history books?"

Herk embarrassed said. " I rarely read at all."

"Well" said Iam. "Back during the revolutionary war there was a brave General Herkimer who fought to the bitter end for Freedom. I'm sorry to say his life's story has a tragic ending. Would you mind if I call you General anyway?"

"If General Herkimer died for the fight of Freedom. Then I'd be honored to carry on the name." Herk said smiling

"Lets take a walk. I want to show you something." Said Iam. They walked while Herk told Iam the story of Freedom.

As they walked, a long haired guy with dungarees and a black and red checked flannel shirt walked up to them. " Wow, I can't believe my eye's. Are you Mr. Iam Righteous?" said the long haired man.

"That be me, brother". Iam said smiling. Shaking the guys hand.

"I truly believe in your platform ,man. I hope you win the election next month." Said the long haired guy.

"We live in a unique country. The people vote the leaders into position. The people are suppose to control the government. Not the other way around!" Exclaimed Iam.

."Right on". Shouted the long haired guy as he walked on.

"I didn't know you were a politician running for office. You looked so normal." said Herk

"General Herkimer, I consider myself one of the good guys". said Iam. Smiling down at Herk.

"And the good guys always win? Right!" Said Herk

"Right!" Said Iam .

Iam and Herk came to the other side of the Smithsonian. Iam points his finger towards the Smithoinian building and says." Herk is that the Freedom your in search of?"

Herk turns towards the building and explodes. Soon as Herk saw the huge tree he new it was his Freedom. Herk runs towards the building Hooting and hollering. Waving his hands in the air like a wild man. "Freedom. Freedom. Freedom." He yelled.

Tears swelled up in Iam eye's as Herk ran towards his Freedom. The jubilation that Herk expressed was overwhelming. Freedom was encased in a twenty story glass Unisphere. The mammoth tree almost filled the entire glass covered round building.

As Iam walked up to Herk from behind. Herk was jumping up and down non stop. Iam came with in ten feet of Herk. Herk stopped jumping and froze in place. Herk started walking backwards. Pointing his finger towards Freedom. He backed right into Iam. When Iam and Herk collided. Herk quickly ran behind Iam and hid behind his Jacket. Herk was still pointing at Freedom. Herks mouth was moving but no words were coming out. Iam crouched down to see what Herk was looking at. Iam peered thru the glass and saw two people in the shadows, laughing. As Iam got closer to the glass structure. In a flash all the lights in the building were turned on. Then it was all clear to Iam. The question as to why Herk was behaving the way he was. The two people in the shadows were Mr. Cap Italist and Senator Bellee Fulajelly.

Iam looked back at Herk who was still catatonic. "Let's get out of here Herk! Iam said. Herk shook his head yes.

Iam Righteous and General Herkimer Diamond walked away from the building. Diapering into the darkness. Once Herk regained his courage they both discussed where Herk would stay the night and both agreed Herk would stay at Iams home. Iam lives in a beautiful Brownstone, with his wife, not far from the Smithsonian.

Arriving at Iams home they are met at the door by Iams wife, Angel. She had dinner waiting for them. Herk ate well. He was very hungry. After dinner Herk asked Iam, " If he could call Smiley?" Of course, Iam felt it was an excellent Idea. Herk felt very comfortable around Iam and

Angel. It was like he new them all his life.

After dinner, Angel went shopping. The guys did the dishes. It's only Righteous.

Angel returned, she walked to the den where Iam and Herk sat talking. She handed Herk a present. It is wrapped in red, white and blue paper. With a big red bow on it. Herk was excited and surprised. Angel handed the present to Herk and said in a soft and comfortiting voice.

"Herk, I thought you could use this tonight." she smiled.

"Thank you, you're very kind." Herk said smiling.

Herk ripped the paper from the box not noticing what it was wrapped in. Angel sat in Iams lap as Herk opens his present. Angel whispers in Iams ear. Iam laughs. Herk pulls the shirt box apart and looks inside.

"Wow" Herk yells.

"Look at the tag. And read it out loud Herk ." Angel said.

"Freedom Lives. A symbol of America" Herk yelled.

Angel and Iam looked at each other and smile. Herk pulled the top part of the pajamas from the box and held it up. The pajamas are made of white flannel with trees printed on it. Embroidered on the breast pocket, it reads. "Freedom Lives". Herk couldn't wait to try on his pajamas. He was shown his room. The bed was very large. He was very tired.

The smell of black coffee and bacon awoke Herkimer from his deep sleep. He climbed down from his bed. Walked down the Mahogany stairs to the den. Iam is sitting reading the morning paper. Herk walks up to Iam and sits on the floor facing Iam.

Iam lowered the morning paper. Iam says. "Morning General." Herk smiles.

"Good Morning Iam." Herk responded.

"How did you sleep?" Iam asked.

"Like a log." Herk said.

Iam smiled. He raised the paper and continued to read. Herk looked at the front page. The caption read. "100,000 expected to attend Smithoinian Tree Exhibit today." Herk noticed a small article just below the Smithoinian article. "Righteous losing against Senator Fulajelly."

Angel walked into the den and smiled. "Anybody hungry?" She asked.

Herk jumped up and ran into the kitchen. Iam stood up. Walked up to Angel and took hold of her hand. They both walked to the kitchen.

After breakfast, Herk and Iam stood next to the kitchen sink. Iam is washing the dishes while Herk is drying the dishes. Angel was upstairs attending to the beds.

Iam looked down at Herk and asked. "So Herk, what do you want to do today? We could go to the Zoo or we could walk through the White house."

Herk shook his head No at both suggestion. "Iam if you don't mind. I'd like to go see, feel and smell my Freedom. I miss my Freedom so much. I read in the news paper the Smithoinian is opening it's tree exhibit today. Could we go see Freedom today Iam. Pretty please ?" Herk said. Looking up at Iam.

"How do you know that it's your Freedom in there?" Iam questioned.

"Iam that tree in there is my Freedom." Herk responded.

"Well Herk, when Angel went out shopping last night. She went to the Smithoinian to buy tickets. But all the tickets were sold out." Iam said. Herk lowered his head. "She felt so bad. She went to the local department store and bought you the pajamas. When the cashier returned her change she also gave Angel three free passes to today's tree exhibit" Iam yelled with excitement.

"Yeee Haw." Herk yelled.

"I suggest, we finish up these dishes. Go help Angel with the beds and leave as soon as possible." Iam said.

"I suggest, you go finish reading the news paper. I'll go help Angel with the beds. I need to thank her for everything." Herk said. As his eye's filled with tears.

"Angel?" Herk called out.

"In here Herk." Angel said.

"Angel, how can I thank you for everything you have done for me?" Herk said. As Angel smoothed the bed sheets with her hand.

Angel sat on the bed and said. "Herk a smile will do."

"Huh?" Herk said. Not understanding the answer.

Angel patted the bed next to her. Herk climbed up on the bed and sat next to Angel. "Smiling is contagious. When you smile everybody smiles back. Herk, I guess what I'm trying to say is. When you smile that means you're happy. Your happiness is more important to us than anything

in the world. We will do anything to keep you happy.” Angel said. As she ran her fingers through Herk's hair.

“Herk, where are your pajamas? I've looked everywhere for them.” Angel asked.

“I still have them on. I promised myself I wasn't going to take them off until I had my Freedom back.” Herk said. As he pulled his shirt open and showed Angel his Pajamas underneath his clothes. Angel smiled as the tears filled her eyes. Knowing the impossible task at hand.

Herk, Angel and Iam walked hand in hand to the Smithsonian. Herk never really had a family. If this is what it felt like to be a family. Then someday he would like his own.

The crowd waiting to get into the Smithsonian was enormous. Herk was nervous. The thought of seeing Freedom after all these years was overwhelming. Also running into Mr. Cap Italist and Senator Bellee Fulajelly. Put Herk on edge.

Finally, Herk entered the Unisphere. His eyes gazed up at Freedom. Herk wanted in the worst way to give Freedom a big hug. The crowd wound its way through the exhibit. Angel, Iam and Herk finally made their way under Freedom. Angel and Iam commented on how beautiful Freedom looked. Herk stood silent looking up at his old friend. A drip landed on Herk's shoulder and then another drip. The drips continued. It was as if Freedom was crying for Herk.

Iam and Angel watched Herk as Herk started to talk to Freedom. “Don't cry Freedom. Everything is going to be alright. I miss you. I want you back home where you belong.” The tears filled Herk's eyes.

“Could I have everybody's attention please. We're about to start our program.” Said a man standing at the podium underneath Freedom. The large crowd quieted down. Iam reached for Angel's hand. Angel reached for Herk's hand. Herk crossed his fingers.

“I like to introduce you to three people responsible for this exhibit. The Director of the Smithsonian, Ill B. Fossil, Senator Bellee Fulajelly and Entrepreneur Cap Italist.

Ill B. Fossil, is the first to walk up to the microphone and speak. “ Good afternoon every one. Thanks for coming. I'd like to thank Senator Bellee Fulajelly. He's the one who pulled the political strings that help transport this magnificent tree. From Beijing, China to the laboratory here in Washington and three years later transported the tree from the Laboratory to this Incredible building on the Smithsonian complex. Without the government's financial support this project would never have gotten off the ground. Literally. Without further ado. Let me introduce you to Senator Bellee Fulajelly and let's not forget this great man is up for reelection next month. ”

The crowd roars with applause. Senator Bellee Fulajelly smiles. Raises both hands over his head and waves at the crowd. Herk looks at Iam. Iam looks at Herk and winks. The Senator walks up to the microphone.

Iam raises his hand and says. " Senator, I have someone here who claims you stole this tree from his property in upstate New York.

The Senator says, "Iam Righteous is the son of one of our presidents. His father was gunned down while in office. Iam, is also my oppent at next months election. Iam, your not doing this to embarrass me before the election, are you?" Iam swallows hard.

"Iam bring this person to me. Let me see my accuser." The Senator says. The crowd boo's Iam. Angel squeezes Iams hand hard.

"I'd like to introduce you to General Herkimer." Iam says. Angel lets go of Herks hand. Herk and Iam weaves there way through the crowd towards the podium.

Once the Senator sees Herk he starts to laugh. The crowd roars with laughter. " Why your not a General, your just a child! Iam, what branch of the service is this General from, the Cub Scouts?" The Senator says while laughing. The crowd laughs louder.

"Son if this is your tree, then prove it?" The Senator bloats.

Herk tugs at Iams jacket sleeve. Iam lowers his head to Herk. Herk whispers in Iams ear. " The General tells me. Many years ago he carved an inscription on that branch, up there." Iam points his finger towards Freedom. The crowd is quiet.

The smile from Senator Bellee Fulajelly face, disappeared. Anger took it's place. The Senator turned his head towards Cap Italist and said something to him. The Senator looked back at Iam and Herk. "I'd like a security guard climb the tree and locate this inscription". Said the Senator.

A Security Guard climbed the trunk of Freedom. He took his time looking for the inscription. The crowd watched and whispered. "There's nothing here." Said the Guard. The crowd went wild.

Senator Bellee Fulajelly pointed his finger at Herk and Iam and said, "I want those two arrested for slander."

The Guards closed in on Iam and Herk. They put handcuffs on both of them. Herk lowered his skinny hands and the handcuffs fell off. Herk made a dash for Freedom. The Guards tried to grab him. Herk was too fast for them. Herk ran past Senator Bellee Fulajelly. Herk climbed up Freedom and on to the branch where he wrote the inscription, many years ago. It wasn't there.

A Security Guard was in hot pursuit of Herk. The Guard climbed Freedom. Herk reached in to his pocket. He pulled out his Swiss Army Knife and opened the blade. The crowd screamed. Iam and Angel looked on in horror. The guard backed off, reaching for his revolver at his side. "The kid has cracked." Someone from the crowd yelled.

Herk dug the knife into Freedom. The crowd screamed. Angel cried. Iam yelled to Herk. " Herk don't do anything foolish Herk."

Herk again stabbed the tree. Herk pulled a large piece rubber off Freedoms branch and Yelled. "It's here. It's here!"

Herk threw the piece of rubber in Iams direction. Angel picked the piece of rubber up. "Angel what is it". Iam said"

"I'm not sure, It looks like rubber or some kind of plastic, like a patch." Angel said, as she turned the patch over. " Wait a minute it says something here, but it's in Chicness. KREH SEVOL SIH MODEERF."

"Could that be chicness, Angel?" Iam said. Iam yelled to Herk. "What does it say, Herk?"

"It's backwards. It says Herk Loves His Freedom!" Yelled Herk from the tree. The crowd roared. Iam smiled to Angel. Angel hugged Iam.

"Take those hand cuffs off of Iam! Yelled Ill B. Fossil. "Arrest those two for stolen property." Mr. Fossil pointed his finger at Senator Bellee Fulajelly and Cap Italist. As they tried to escape out one of the fire exit doors. The guards surrounded the two of them and quickley handcuffed them.