

The Magic Pen

A fun, fanciful, artsy tale!

By Bill Willis

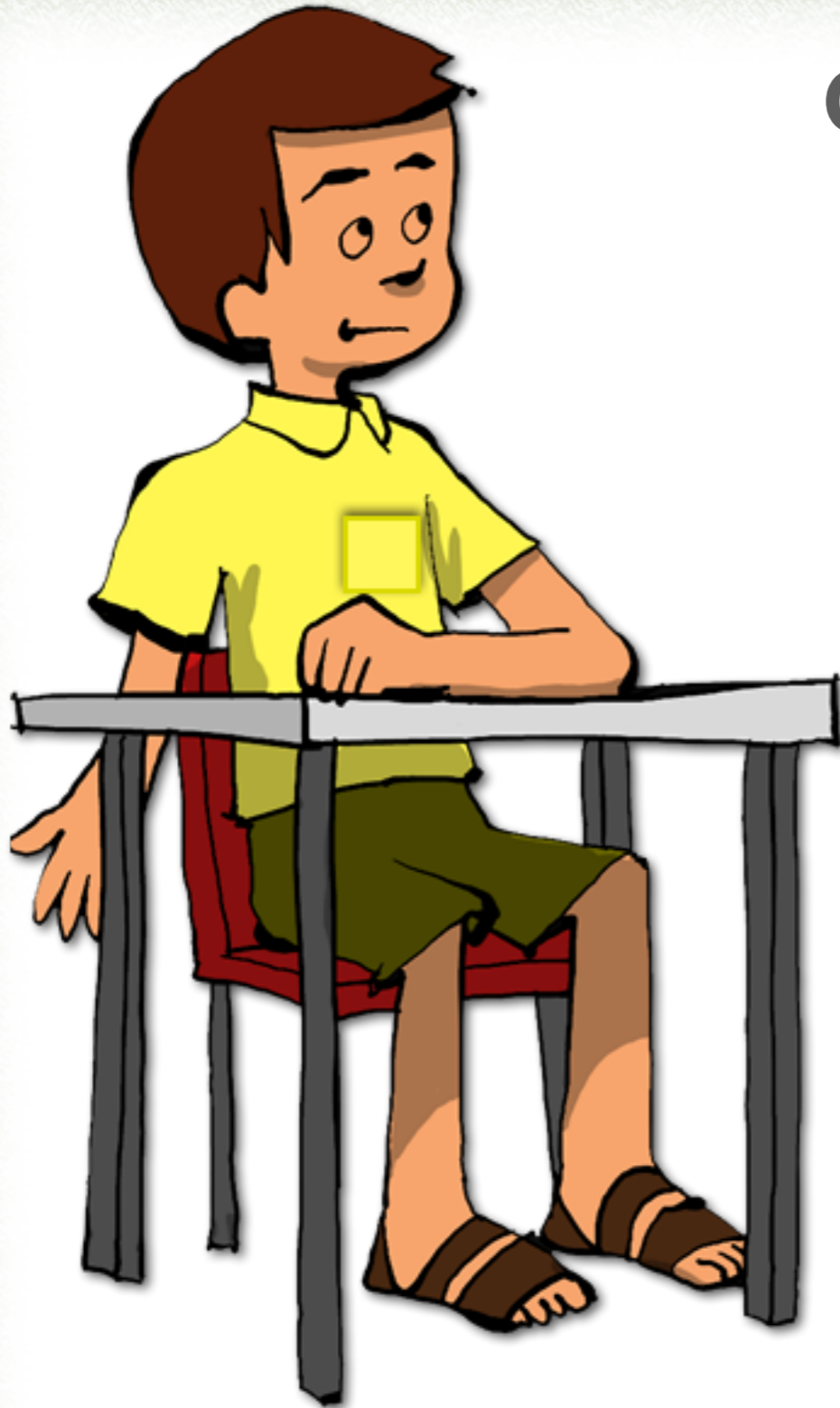
Help me!



Featuring
Virtual Reading
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By Michelle Willis, M.Ed.





Chapter 1

Nine-year-old Tommy Barnes had just finished his math and reading homework. Leaning back in his chair, his eyes caught sight of a fat round glass packed full of old pens, pencils, and other school supplies. He didn't remember how long the glass had been there. It seemed like it had been there forever. Curious, he jumped up and hastily grabbed the glass, spilling its contents onto the floor. He picked up each object, checking to see if any were still usable.

Tommy decided the six-inch ruler might come in handy, and some of the colored pencils were still usable, but needed sharpening. One by one he picked up the pens, testing each by scribbling on a sheet of paper.

Two were dried up, but the third, a beautiful emerald green pen with plenty of ink, did something very strange. Instead of scribbling, Tommy's hand started writing. When it stopped, this is what he had written: Help me!

"Why would I write that?" he asked out loud.

Suddenly, a tiny voice whispered, "You didn't write that. I did."

"Huh?" uttered Tommy, totally confused. "Pens don't talk."

"This one does," corrected the pen.



Tommy sat there with his mouth wide open, totally shocked. He didn't know what to say.

"I need your help," repeated the pen.

"What kind of help?" Tommy asked. He couldn't believe he was actually talking to a pen.

"I don't want to spend my whole life in that glass," lamented the pen. "I have things I want to do." He paused and took a deep breath. "By the way, you can call me Peter."

"What do you want me to do, Peter?" Tommy asked incredulously.

"I want you to take me with you, out into the world, where I can see things and do something with my life," cried Peter. "Do you have any idea how boring it is to be stuck in that glass all day?"

"I never thought about it," admitted Tommy. "But now that you mention it, I imagine it must be quite boring."

“Well it’s very boring indeed!” exclaimed Peter. “So, have we got a deal? You’ll help make my dream come true?”

“Well, yes, of course,” assured Tommy, still in a state of shock. “What do you want me to do?”

“I want you to take me with you, everywhere you go, so I can start living my life and expressing what’s locked up inside me,” explained Peter.

Tommy was beginning to feel sorry for the little pen and eager to help him, even though he still couldn’t believe this was really happening. Of course, who would? There’s no such thing as a talking pen!

“Just take me with you,” instructed Peter. “I’ll tell you when there’s something we should do.”





“I’ll carry you right up here in my shirt pocket,” Tommy said, securely tucking Peter in. “That way you can see everything. Now, I have to go downstairs for dinner.”

“Awesome!” Peter said excitedly. “Let the adventures begin!”

Tommy joined his mother, father, and 5-year-old sister Carrie for dinner. As much as he wanted to tell his family about his new friend, he decided it wasn’t yet time. He could hardly eat, though, knowing he had a talking pen in his pocket. He wondered what Peter was thinking, and mused about it. He wondered if Peter wished he was a boy like him, instead of a pen, so he could eat food, especially desserts. He wondered what life with Peter was going to be like. Peter talked about adventures. What did he mean?

As he returned to his room, Tommy’s imagination was running wild.



When he got to his room, Tommy sat back down at his desk and set Peter in front of him.

“What now?” Tommy asked.

“Please take out a blank sheet of paper,” requested Peter.

“What for?” asked Tommy.

“You’ll see,” said Peter, as Tommy grabbed a sheet of paper and placed it on the desk.

“Okay, pick me up so I can draw,” requested Peter.

Tommy took the pen in his hand and before he knew it, he was drawing lines and curves.

“What’s going on?” asked Tommy, feeling out of control as his hand raced around the paper at a feverish pace.

“You’ll see,” insisted Peter. “I’m almost done.”

When Tommy saw what Peter was drawing, he realized it was exactly what Peter had just witnessed — his family at the dinner table. And, it was good, really good.

Then the drawing stopped, and Peter said, “Put me down. I need a rest.”

Tommy laid Peter down beside the drawing and studied the picture. It was almost like a photograph. Every person’s face was drawn perfectly, the plates and glasses placed with precision. Every person and object in the picture displayed realistic detail.

“How did you do that?” implored Tommy. “You drew all of that in less than five minutes, and it’s all perfectly drawn.”

“It’s what I do,” replied Peter. “Put together a folder with lots of paper in it. I want to draw all the cool things you show me.”

Tommy stood up, opened the top drawer of his desk, and selected a red folder. He inserted about twenty sheets of plain white paper.

“Okay, that’s done,” said Tommy. “Now what?”

“Now we go to sleep and get a good night’s rest. Tomorrow is going to be a big day at school, right? “I can’t wait!”

At nine o’clock, Tommy slipped into his pajamas and crawled into bed. After saying goodnight to Peter, he turned off the light, but sleep came reluctantly. What would tomorrow be like?



Chapter 2



The next day as Tommy and Peter arrived at school, Peter watched everything from Tommy's shirt pocket. He saw the school buses dropping kids off, and kids going in all directions, heading to their classrooms. Some stopped to play.

Peter was particularly interested in the kids passing around an orange ball.

“What's that over there?”

“That's the basketball court,” announced Tommy. “You'll see what that is later,” he added, as they made their way to his classroom.

“Good morning, Tommy,” called the lady in the front of the classroom. Peter could see that this lady was younger than Tommy’s mother, very pretty, with a sweet but firm voice.

“Good morning, Ms. James,” responded Tommy. Then whispering toward his pocket to warn Peter, he said, “Don’t talk while we’re in here. I’ll get in trouble.”

“Got it,” Peter whispered.

Finally the school day got underway. First was Reading. Five classmates took turns reading a paragraph from their reading book, while everyone else followed along. Next came Math. Tommy answered correctly and Peter was elated for him. He could see that students getting the right answer pleased Ms. James too.





At recess the whole class went outside. Some kids were playing basketball. Some were jumping rope. Some were swinging from the bars, and a handful were walking around the jogging trail. Peter was taking everything in.

“You okay?” asked Tommy.

“I’m fine,” declared Peter. “You get to do this every day?”

“Yep!” confessed Tommy.

“Lucky you!” exclaimed Peter. “I can’t wait to get home. I have a lot of pictures to draw.”

“I’ll be anxious to see them,” Tommy said out of the corner of his mouth, hoping no one realized he was talking to a pen.

The rest of the day included Music, lunch, Social Studies, and Language Arts.

When the dismissal bell rang, Tommy raced home, with Peter bouncing up and down in his pocket. Once home, he skipped his usual snack and headed straight upstairs to his room.

“Going to do my homework, Mom,” he called.

“Okay,” his mother called back, as Tommy and Peter bounded up the stairs.

In no time at all, Tommy was seated at his desk, paper out, pen in hand. Peter began to draw. First he drew a beautiful picture of Tommy’s teacher, Ms. James. Then Peter drew a picture of kids playing at recess, followed by a cafeteria picture and one of his class during Social Studies. The last picture showed a group of kids singing during Music class.

Tommy put the magic pen down, and Peter let out a shriek, like a runner who had just come across the finish line of a long race. Tommy felt exhilarated too.



“I must admit,” exclaimed Peter, “drawing is a lot of fun, and it gives me energy!”

“I think you are right,” agreed Tommy.

The most amazing part was that Peter’s pictures were coming out in color, while the pen had only one color in it — blue. Tommy wondered how this could be possible.



Later that evening Tommy's father announced that since tomorrow was Saturday, he had planned a special family trip to the zoo.

"What's a zoo?" whispered Peter.

Tommy headed back to his room so he could answer Peter's question. "It's a place where all kinds of animals live: monkeys, lions, tigers, giraffes, elephants, and zebras. You will love it!"

Tommy realized he was not only becoming more comfortable with the idea of a pen that talks and draws but also that he and Peter were quickly becoming best friends.

The next morning, when they arrived at the zoo, it was very crowded.

“What a place!” shouted Peter, forgetting himself for a moment. He quickly ducked deeper into Tommy’s pocket, not wanting to put Tommy in the awkward place of having to explain him to his family. When Tommy managed to get a little ahead of his parents and sister, Peter poked his head out again and bellowed, “This place is awesome!”

“Which animals do you like best?” asked Tommy.

“Oh, that’s easy,” Peter replied. “The monkeys are my favorite. I like the way they can climb and swing. I wish I could climb and swing like that! And have you ever noticed all the funny facial expressions they make?”

“I’ll bet you can draw every animal in the zoo,” whispered Tommy.

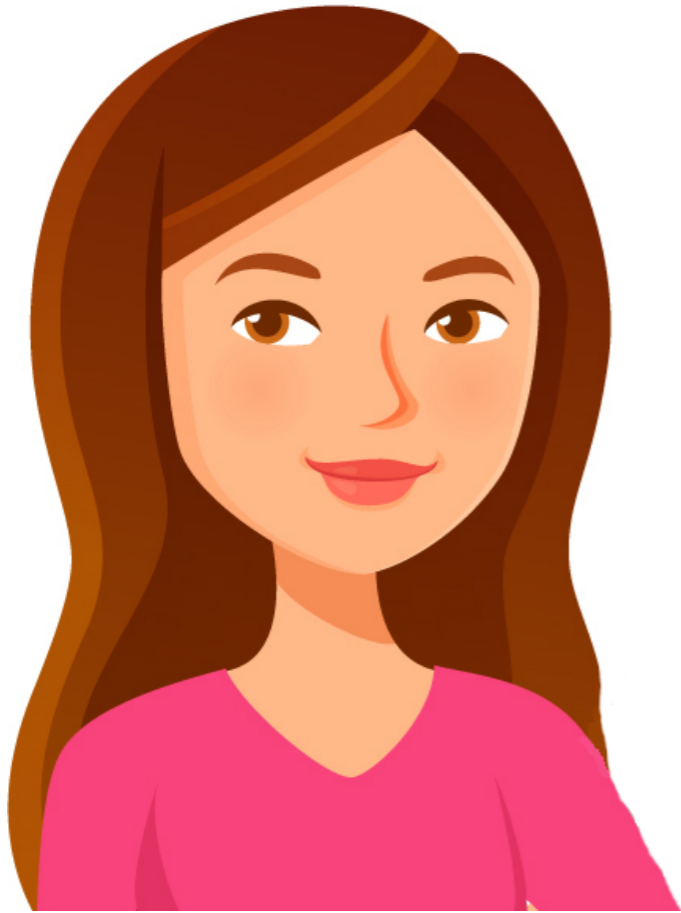
“Definitely,” replied Peter. “I can’t wait to get home and get started.”

Later, the four hours at the zoo led to an hour of drawing. Tommy and Peter did it in two sessions of thirty minutes each, with sixteen pictures in all. There were pictures of elephants, gorillas, peacocks, ostriches, bears, lions, and many others. But the best picture of all was the one of the monkey with his “thumbs up” gesture, excited eyes, and big smile.



Tommy sat there admiring the drawings, thinking about Peter’s talent, wondering what it would be like if he could draw like that. He realized a lot had happened in a short time, but he did not expect what was going to happen next.

Chapter 3



“What are all these pictures?” asked Tommy’s mother the next morning at breakfast. “I went up to get your laundry and saw this folder of pictures lying open on your desk,” she said, holding up the red folder.

Tommy gulped. “I ... well ... umm ...”

“These are incredible Tommy,” exclaimed his mother.

“I had no idea you could do this kind of drawing. Why haven’t I seen drawings like this before?”

Tommy squirmed in his chair. He was uncomfortable letting his mother think he drew the pictures, but how could he tell her the truth?

“I don’t know what to tell you, Mom,” Tommy stammered. “It’s not quite what it seems.”

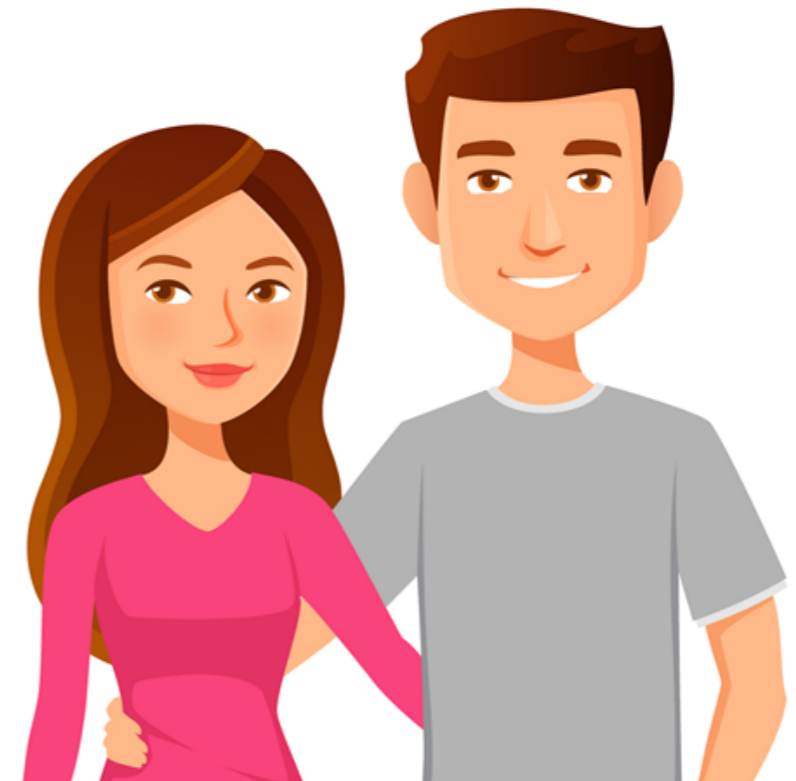
“These are exceptional drawings,” his mother repeated. “I can’t wait to show them to your father.”

She had barely gotten out those words when Tommy’s father walked into the kitchen.

“Am I missing something?” his father questioned.

Tommy gulped down some milk, trying to hide behind the glass. He avoided making eye contact with his father.

“Look at what your son has been doing,” Tommy’s mother said, anxious to see her husband’s reaction.



Tommy jumped up from the table and dashed to his room.

“My mom found the drawings,” gasped Tommy. “She thinks I drew them,” he told Peter breathlessly.

“Well, you did draw them. Sort of ...,” suggested Peter.

“But Peter, it doesn’t feel right. They think I actually did draw them.” He took a deep breath and let it out with a sigh. “We have to tell them the truth.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, we need to go down together and explain this.”

“Okay. We’re in this together,” Peter agreed. “I know this won’t be easy for you, but it’s the right thing to do.”

When Tommy and Peter entered the kitchen, Tommy’s parents were still admiring his drawings.



“Mom, Dad, I need you to sit down for a minute.”

His parents sat down at the kitchen table, and Tommy couldn't help but notice the smiles on their faces — proud smiles.

“I have a confession to make,” Tommy began. “I didn't draw these pictures,” pointing to the stack of drawings on the table. “He did,” Tommy admitted, holding Peter out for them to see.

His parents looked dumbfounded. Their eyes were riveted on Tommy, beseeching him to tell the truth.

“This is my best friend,” Tommy said. “His name is Peter.”

Bewilderment now turned to worry. Tommy knew what the look on his parents' faces meant. The words didn't come out of their mouths, but Tommy knew what they were probably thinking.

“What's happened to our son? Has he gone crazy? His best friend is a pen?”

“Say hello, Peter,” Tommy instructed, as he lay the pen on the table.

“Hello,” came Peter’s tiny voice.



Tommy’s parents were astonished.

“Is this some kind of puppet trick, Tommy?” asked his father. “Are you learning to be a ventriloquist?”

“No, Dad! Peter is for real. He drew all the pictures. I just held the pen for him.”

“It’s true,” piped in Peter with his small determined voice.

Tommy took a deep breath and then told his parents the whole story.

Chapter 4



Peter was going to school with Tommy every day, and he was adding Math and Science pictures to his collection of drawings. Everything Tommy was learning, Peter was absorbing, and Peter had a very unique way of illustrating things on paper. When the class was done with Math, he'd draw pictures of shapes and ways of measuring. The ruler with its confused expression was Tommy's favorite. When the class had a science lesson about the planets, Peter produced detailed pictures of the solar system.

But Tommy's secret was about to be exposed to more than just his family. Soon the whole school would know.

“Tommy,” Ms. James called as he was coming back into the classroom after recess. “What are all these drawings? Where did they come from?” She held up one of his folders.

“Oops,” Tommy whispered to Peter under his breath.

“Just some drawings, that’s all, Ms. James,” stammered Tommy.

“Well, Tommy,” exclaimed Ms. James, “these are very good!”

Once again Tommy found himself in a dilemma. Should he tell her about Peter, or let her think he drew the pictures?

Before he had a chance to explain, she took matters into her own hands.

“I’m going to take these to Mrs. Hall, the art teacher.” Turning to her Teacher Aide she added, “Take over for me. I’ll be right back.”



“Oh no,” Tommy whispered to Peter. “What should we do?”

“I don’t know.” Peter was as stumped as Tommy.

A few minutes later Ms. James returned with Mrs. Hall, the art teacher.

“Tommy,” Mrs. Hall called. “Come with me please. We shouldn’t be too long, Ms. James,” assured Mrs. Hall, as she walked out the door with Tommy.



Tommy was sweating profusely. He was worried about what might be coming next. They were heading directly for the Principal’s Office.

“Mrs. Hall, am I in trouble?” asked Tommy, shaking from head to toe.

“Of course not!” She turned toward him with a big wide grin, which, in this situation, felt very reassuring. “Don’t worry,” she said.

Mrs. Hall didn't even stop to ask permission to see the Principal. She barged right in. Tommy's heart was racing. Peter ducked deeper into Tommy's pocket to keep out of sight.

"Sorry to barge right in," Mrs. Hall said apologetically, "but I thought you'd want to see these right away." She handed the folder to Mrs. Hanlon, the Principal.

Mrs. Hanlon looked over the drawings, then set the folder on her desk. It seemed an eternity before she spoke.

"Tommy," she began, staring straight at him. "Did you draw these?"

"Sort of," Tommy admitted in a low whisper. He was afraid to look at her and lowered his eyes.

"Sort of? What does that mean Tommy? Please look at me."

"Well, it wasn't me exactly. It was him," said Tommy, pulling Peter out of his pocket and holding him up so she could see him.

“This is the pen you used to draw the pictures?” asked Mrs. Hanlon.

Peter piped up. “Actually, I drew the pictures.”

Mrs. Hanlon shrieked. “This can’t be happening! A talking pen?”

“It’s true,” said Tommy. “This is Peter, my best friend.” Then Tommy told Mrs. Hall and Mrs. Hanlon the whole story.

The rest of the day was a whirlwind of activity. Word got around fast. Kids were coming at them from all directions, racing to see the amazing talking pen. Peter spent his time saying hello to groups of kids, while Tommy displayed the collection of drawings. At first all the attention was fun and exciting, but after a while, the pair was exhausted and ran home as fast as Tommy’s feet could carry them. They hid in Tommy’s room. Strangely, Peter was very quiet. Tommy wondered why.



“Peter, you’re very quiet. Is something wrong?”

“Well,” Peter said in his small voice. “There’s something I must tell you. You aren’t going to like it, but in the end it will be all right.”

“What is it Peter?” Tommy’s mind was racing, but he couldn’t imagine what would make Peter so glum.

“I’m running out of ink,” Peter moaned. “I only have enough ink for one more picture.”

“That’s what you’re so worried about?” asked Tommy.

“No problem. We’ll get some more ink tomorrow.”

“You don’t understand,” pouted Peter. “One more picture. That’s it!”



“Wait a minute,” Tommy grumbled, his heart sinking. “You can’t mean that. What will I do without you? You’re the artist, not me.”

“Actually Tommy, that’s not true. You are the ‘real’ artist. I was sent to help you discover your own talent. I knew from the start this arrangement would have to come to an end.”

“I won’t be able to do it without you Peter. You can’t leave me.”

“You CAN do it Tommy,” Peter insisted, “and you WILL do it. It was you doing it all along. You just didn’t know it. Listen, I have enough ink for one more picture. I’ll guide you, but you must trust your own ability.” Peter paused for a second. Then he said, “Take out a clean sheet of paper and pick me up.”

“But I don’t know what to draw,” protested Tommy.

“Just draw what’s in you heart,” explained Peter.

“What do you mean? I don’t get it,” Tommy wailed.

“What people and things do you care about most?” Peter inquired. “Sit quietly for a moment and think about these.”

At first Tommy struggled with this exercise, but after a while he began to see people and images taking shape in the landscape of his mind.

“I think I’m getting it,” he reported. “I feel energy, and I see colors and images — all sorts of things!”

“That’s awesome!” shouted Peter. “What I suspected about you is true. Drawing is your inner ‘spark.’ Drawing makes you feel alive and energized. It motivates you. It helps you express who you truly are as a person. It gives your life meaning.”

“Hum...,” Tommy said, as he considered Peter’s explanation.

“Trust me,” advised Peter. “The ‘spark’ for drawing is in you. You just have to let it out. That’s why I was sent to you.”

Tommy was just about to draw his last picture with Peter when he heard his mother calling him. At first her voice was very faint, but suddenly he was jolted out of a deep sleep. At that moment, he realized his whole experience with Peter had been a dream.

“Tommy It’s time to get up for school,” his mother called again.

“Okay Mom, I’m awake,” Tommy called back.

He didn’t jump right up out of bed, though. Instead, he lay still, recalling as much of his dream as he could. He glanced at the dresser, eager to see if the fat round glass was actually there. It was. He bounced out of bed and ran toward it. Grabbing it with one hand, he lost his grip. Everything went tumbling out onto the floor. His eyes searched for the green pen, but it wasn’t there. He sank to the floor, deeply disappointed, wishing he could talk to Peter one last time.



Tommy focused on Peter's last words. Peter had spoken about Tommy letting his drawing talent come out. Not sure, but willing to try, he picked up a few colored pencils, pulled out a blank sheet of paper, and began to draw. Soon he was drawing lines and curves, just like he did at the beginning of the dream, when he thought it was Peter doing the drawing.

"Draw what's in your heart," came a faint little voice.

"Peter, is that you? Where are you?" cried Tommy.

"I'm inside you, Tommy, in your heart. I'm your inner 'spark.' Every time you draw a new picture, I'll be with you. Trust yourself!"

The End