

## Down at Mimico Creek and The Robber in the Crawlspace



When we were kids, my best friend Laurie and I had only one serious argument. It was about imagination. I was convinced that a good imagination was the key to a wonderful life. And Laurie dared to say that sometimes an overactive imagination wasn't a good thing...

I met Laurie in Grade 2, when I was seven and she was just turning seven. We lived several blocks apart, but that didn't prevent us from becoming fast friends. I can still remember her phone number since I dialled it so often — Belmont 1-7862. We had some great adventures.

One of the first things we did was found The Mystery Gang, consisting of — you guessed it — Laurie and me. Our first big mystery concerned the Robber in the Crawlspace. We were convinced that there was a robber living in the crawlspace of my home near Rathburn and

Highway 27. The evidence was clear. We had developed a poison potion, consisting of all the awful things we could think of: my Dad's cigarette butts, mud, Javex and liquid laundry detergent. The resulting drink looked a bit like bubbly chocolate milk, thanks mainly to the mud and the laundry detergent. We put this concoction into the crawlspace and a day or two later, it was gone! Proof positive that the robber was living there.

We weren't sure if our poisonous solution would kill him or whether he would still be free to rob other houses at will. We had figured out how he did this — it was through an intricate series of tiled tunnels that led from my house to other houses in the neighbourhood, including Laurie's on Agar Crescent, several blocks away. We decided we had better ask the police to investigate.

Laurie's Dad was a policeman. In fact, he one day rose to become Deputy Police Chief of Toronto. But on investigation day, he was sleeping because he had to work a night shift. There was another policeman who lived on my street, Detective Ian Renn. We went to the Renn's house, knocked on the door, and Mr. Renn (who was friends with my parents) agreed to come over and investigate. He brought a flashlight with him, but he didn't bring a gun. I'm not sure whether Laurie and I asked him to bring one, but we might have. We were deathly afraid of the robber. Mr. Renn poked his flashlight around the crawlspace, uncovered some old boxes and some cat poop (from our family pet, Fluffy). But no robber.

"We must have killed him with our potion," Laurie and I told him seriously, describing the noxious ingredients. I'm sure Mr. Renn had a good chuckle.

Years later, we asked my mother if she remembered the episode. "Yes, there was some awful-looking stuff in a glass in the crawlspace. I wondered what it was. I threw it out," said Mom.

Mystery solved.

Laurie and I also had our own little countries in the Mimico Creek Valley across Martingrove Road from Laurie's home. The creek has since been gentrified with a walkway and some mowed parkland, but back in the 1960s it was wilderness. The slope down to the creek was covered with weeds and was, depending on the season, slippery with fallen leaves, icy, muddy or baked dry by the summer sun. It was the '60s; our parents had no problem with us playing there, and even encouraged us to bring our little brothers. Laurie and I thought it was heaven.

There were little islets in the stream, and we created two countries, Fluffikin and Crackerkin. These were very predictable names as I had a cat named Fluffy, and Laurie had a hamster named Crackers. Each country was composed of several islets. We drew maps showing the location of the islets. Our countries had their own languages, based mainly on Pig Latin. Fluffikin even had a National Anthem. Because Fluffy was a cat, the National Anthem was (English Translation): "Turn on the lamp, so I can spy, the lovely plate, with chicken on it."

Who said imagination was a bad thing?

More than 60 years later, Laurie and I are still best friends, even though we live thousands of miles apart. She became a librarian and currently lives on one of the Gulf Islands between Vancouver and Victoria. And I of course, became a writer, and live in Etobicoke, a few kilometres from our childhood haunts.

It's one of those friendships where we just pick up the conversation even if we haven't spoken for several months or even years.

And we both still have great imaginations!