

A Pirate's Life for Me

by RV Staff Writer J.C.

Most babies' first words are something like "Dada" or "Mama" or "ball."

Mine was "Ahoy!" But that was considered normal when you're born and raised on a pirate ship.

My father was the first mate on the fearsome sailing ship known as the *Salty Dog*. He was the trusted friend of the captain; in charge of keeping the sailors in line and keeping the ship in good shape and on course.

My mother was the lookout who climbed high up the mast to the crow's nest with her spyglass to look out for other ships, for signs of land, or for hints of danger. When I was a baby, she'd strap me securely to her back as she scampered up, nimble as a monkey, to the topmost part of the ship and show me the world. The sea and air stretched endlessly around us in all directions. She was always proud that I was never seasick or afraid of the great heights when we climbed, while the salty ocean breezes whipped through our hair, making us laugh; our shouts getting carried off in the wind.

When I wasn't in the crow's nest, I was in the ship's galley with the cook, learning how to peel potatoes and make enough stew for three dozen hungry sailors who had no table manners and never remembered to say "please" or "thank you." Dinner had to be good, or else they'd throw their empty tin cups at your head. I learned to stay out of range after the food was served. I was able to duck from most of the items flung in my direction when the stew wasn't seasoned enough or the bread was too stale and rock hard.

Because I was still a child, I wasn't allowed to join in during the raids on other ships. "Too young to be useful," the pirates grumbled, and my mother hid me away below deck. I could still hear them clashing swords and battling the surprised men from the sailboat they had targeted for its cargo: strawberries and emeralds, both equally valuable to pirates on the high seas.

The crew were fierce fighters; we always won. Those nights that followed would be full of merriment, as sailors toasted each other with bottles of stolen rum. They boasted about what adventures they could have with a pocketful of emeralds when we next landed on some tropical island. The cook made good use of the strawberries which had the extra vitamins needed to ensure the crew avoided getting scurvy for a while longer.

A few months later, we sailed into the sultry green port of Montego Bay. The sailors were anxious to feel solid ground beneath their feet once more and were in high spirits as they left the ship. They hadn't noticed the band of local police officers who waited on the docks to apprehend them until it was too late.

My parents were also arrested as part of the crew who, truth be told, had stolen from more than just one ship during our voyage. It would not be the first time they had seen the inside of a jail cell. My

father kissed my mother a sweet goodbye as they were dragged in opposite directions to separate prisons. My mother blew me kisses for as long as she could see me, still standing in my favorite place, high above the world in the crow's nest.

“Boy! You keep the *Salty Dog* ship-shape, and we'll be back before that baby face of yours has a man's beard upon it!” My father yelled heartily to me, still smiling his famous, gold-capped grin.

And that's exactly what I did. When my parents were finally released years later, they again boarded the trusty vessel I had learned to sail and polish and mend in their absence. But this time when we set out once again on the seas, I was the one wearing the captain's hat.

Questions

1. Who is the narrator in the story?
2. Find the simile in this passage. What does it compare?
3. What is a crow's nest as described in this story?
4. What did it mean when the narrator said he was "the one wearing the captain's hat"?