

## Henry the Bead Person

There once was a boy named Henry. Henry was a happy boy, despite the fact that he had no face and he was made of beads. He was made of 16 polished wooden beads to be exact, but that didn't matter. He was always told by the person that made him, that it was what was on the inside of a person that counted, and he knew he was a good person inside. He liked to know that people were happy and loved and that they weren't locked outside on snowy nights.

One day Henry decided that he would walk from his house to the ocean, which was quite a significant decision, given his landlocked house in central Canada and the fact that his stride was only about an inch and a half when running. But he didn't mind. Henry welcomed a good challenge. He lived for challenges; after all everything he wished to do in life was a significant challenge. He couldn't simply climb the stairs because he was only half as high as the bottom stair, and it was slippery as hell. He couldn't listen to music, because not only could he not see the buttons on the stereo, he couldn't press them with his weak, thread wrist. Henry couldn't even open a door when he wanted to go outside; he had to wait until someone else decided it would be a good time to go outside. Yes, Henry was used to inconveniences, but he was determined to rise above them and make something of himself by becoming the very first bead person to ever walk from Moosejaw, Saskatchewan, to the Pacific Ocean. He couldn't be sure of course that he would be the first, but he had a good feeling he would be.

Henry decided he would set out on his journey on April 15<sup>th</sup>, but sadly he had to wait until the 20<sup>th</sup> before anyone else opened the front door. He didn't mind though. He

sat patiently, humming songs in his head and crossing and uncrossing his legs like he thought a regular person might, because he wanted to appear normal when he appeared at the sea, and if he couldn't cross his legs properly, someone would notice and probably make fun of him.

And so on the morning of the 20<sup>th</sup> of April, when Henry's adopted father, Mr. Brigham opened the door to go back to work after an extended absence due to a pesky cold, Henry waved good bye to anyone who might be standing behind him, (although there was no one, and he couldn't tell the difference, having no face,) and set out onto the front porch.

He stood for some time there, having never been outside and having no idea whatsoever where the ocean might be, but he felt purposeful and accomplished despite his uncertainty. He stood still for a while, listening to the outside sounds of the world through the vibrations on the porch, and in the air. He had no ears, but vibrations were vibrations, and he could feel them just the same as any other boy.

After a while he heard some laughing people drive by in a car, and he felt they were surely going to the ocean, for how could anyone so happily laughing, not be going to the ocean?

From the sound of their passing, they were travelling west, or to the right, so far as Henry was concerned and so he climbed down from the porch and trotted across the grass after their laughter. He ran for a minute or two, shouting out to them in his head because of course he didn't have a mouth, but they didn't hear him. After a while he gave up and simply walked, because walking was really just as good as running.

After an hour or so, another car drove by and someone was playing a guitar out of the window. Henry thought to himself that it would be the nicest thing in the world to be able to play the guitar, and so he tried to call out to the musician, but of course he couldn't. This didn't discourage him though, because he'd once heard someone say that people liked to play the guitar on the beach, so surely there would be plenty of guitars and nice people to teach him when he got to the ocean. This made him smile; inside of course, because he had no lips.

It got a little quiet as the day continued on and no more cars passed, so Henry tried to whistle a catchy tune that was stuck in his head. He thought he heard something for a moment there, but then he remembered he had no lips and it was probably just a bird somewhere in the trees, so he craned his neck around to try and catch a glimpse of such a beautiful creature. This too proved useless of course as he had no eyes, but he could feel the sun on his bead face and hear the whisper of wind in the trees, and he was sure the birds were riding the trees, singing down to him with happiness in their hearts and the wish that he could enjoy their music as much as they did. He waved up at them just in case they were looking at him, to let them know he heard them and he was thankful.

That night when the sun went down and the moon came out and Henry decided his bead legs were tired and his bead arms were cold, he walked seven steps away from the road and fell down to sleep, because he didn't need a pillow and there weren't any blankets around worth looking for. He was pretty sure he was sleeping in clover though, because the ground didn't hurt at all, and clover was beautiful just like his country-surely it would be growing everywhere, he thought.

He had a dream that he was on a surfboard in the Pacific Ocean, jamming with his buddies and listening to music that was pounding out of the back of a van on the beach. He was sliding around on his board a little, being that his feet were beads and beads have no grip, but he was mostly just like everyone else. Someone to his right said “Kowabunga!” And Henry tried to say it back but of course he couldn’t. He tried to give a thumbs up instead, but he had no thumbs, so instead he just nodded in the general direction of the shouting person and continued on, gliding over the water like a space-age hovercraft.

When he woke up, he realized that he was sitting on something warm and smooth and the sun was on his face, and there was a breeze across his bead head. He looked around and tried to figure out what was happening, but learned nothing.

Suddenly music crackled to life somewhere ahead of him, filling the air with a sweet, folk melody and he realize he was in a car! He wondered how he came to be in the car, when he realized that he was a bit wet, and that he’d probably been peed on a by a road user with a full bladder. This didn’t bother him though, because the pee break had lead the person to discover him, and they were now taking him along which was wonderful because the ocean was so far away and surely a car would be a better way to get there than walking on bead feet.

Henry wanted to stand up and shake the hand of the person who had given him such a tremendous leg up in life, but he found it nearly impossible to stand as they bounced over the road, so instead he sat still where he was and enjoyed the wonderful balance of warm sun and cool wind on his beads.

The person who had picked him up seemed to be a fan of emerging North American folk/pop music, so Henry was exposed, during the next several hours, to an onslaught of Mumford and Sons' expressions of love, and Avett Brothers' celebrations of all things normal. His favourite song was The Once and Future Carpenter by the Avett Brothers, because it reminded of himself when the brothers sang:

*Once I was a carpenter and man my hands were callused,  
I could swing a metal mallet sure and straight;  
But I took to the highway, a poet young and hungry,  
And I left the timbers rotting where they lay.*

The words seemed addressed to him in particular, as if someone had been listening to his thoughts all these years and decided they were good enough to sing about, because he too had always loved poetry, and he too was now on the road, pursuing his dream. It was incredible! Henry guessed this was what it must be like to fall in love, and he was pretty much right.

They drove together for hours and hours and hours, he and the driver, to the tunes of these fresh new musicians. Henry rejoiced in his upper chest beat, feeling it might pound itself to pieces with joy. Every moment was like his first few steps, or the moment when he climbed off of his porch; so full of beauty and potential. He hummed along in his head to the music coming from the stereo and wondered who the person was that was so kind to pick him up, covered in pee as he was. He wondered if the person was a handsome young man from the prairies, headed to the ocean to discover his dreams too. Surely there were plenty of them around in Moosejaw; land locked as it was, just

yearning for the fresh, salty sea in their faces and the feel of a long board beneath their feet.

Henry wasn't hungry, because there was no stomach in his beads. Nor was he thirsty, because there were no esophagus or mucus glands in his upper beads, but he felt empty in some strange sort of way. He was happy there was sun and happy there was a car and happy someone had picked him up and happy he had come to be alive, and very happy he was headed for the sea, but something was missing. He wondered if it might be love, or words, or perhaps the taste of fried chicken, but he couldn't ask the driver what they thought because he had no tongue. So he sat still, with his right leg crossed over the left because he had decided that that was the proper way to cross one's legs.

As the hours dragged on, Henry wondered about the person who had first made him. He didn't remember being made, for surely there was no way he could have been conscious while his beads were being threaded together, but he did remember being in someone's hand, and being laid down in a small, rickety hand-made bed, and disappearing from the sun for months at a time. He remembered a burning in his heart when he yearned to be out moving about and touching things with his bead hands, but not being able to because there was some sort of roof to the place where he was laying. He remembered when the dreams about the ocean had started, and the burning had spread to fill up every one of his sixteen beads, including the thread! He remembered when he finally pushed the lid off of wherever he was and felt his way along the wall to the front door where he sat waiting to be released. He remembered the first moment he felt air on his bead face and the rough wood of the porch on his bead feet, and realized that he had a destiny.

He smiled in his head at that last memory in particular. In comparison to the boring silence of the dark place where he'd laid under a roof, the feeling of a breeze on his bead face and the certainty that he had a destiny was simply the difference between light and dark. In one scenario he was just a bead person with no where to go; in the other, he was Henry the Bead Person, headed for the ocean. He was someone.

He had no face, but he smiled in his head all the rest of the way until they stopped and the driver got out and Henry was left alone in the car. He thanked the driver in his head, for giving him some privacy, and wriggled around until he found a road map to sleep under.

Pulling the map over his legs, he rested his bead hands on top of the hard, cardboardy surface of the map and let his mind wander until he fell asleep.

That night he dreamed that the driver of the car who he'd believed to be a nice person, was actually a very bad man with a pair of scissors in his glovebox that he was planning to use to snip Henry in half! In the dream, the driver of the car, who had no face, stepped towards Henry in the light of the dull glow from the glovebox, where he stood with the scissors glimmering in the light, snipping them menacingly over Henry's small body which was trapped under the weight of the map.

Henry woke up with a start, trembling under his map blanket, and quickly shoved it aside. He sat up, panting, but not really, and wondering if he would be able to escape from the car.

First he tried the back door to his left, but it was stuck shut! Next he tried the back right door, but it too was irrevocably shut! Finally, in a desperate leap, he threw his bead

body to the front driver's side door and pulled with all his weight, down, down, down, on the handle until it suddenly clicked and the door swung open.

He was free!

He paused for a moment, waiting to see if he would be thrown back into the car.

When nothing happened, he sucked in a deep breath, but not really, and let go.

His head hit the pavement with a clack like the end of a shoelace, and he slumped over in a pool of beads and thread. He lay still, waiting,

For a minute nothing happened...and then for five minutes nothing happened...and then Henry stood up, a bit wobbly and made his way in a direction that he hoped to be the one leading to the ocean. He couldn't be sure, but he felt that God wouldn't let him go astray. So he walked with his head held high and a spring in his step and all the purpose of a graduate crossing the stage. He had somewhere to be, and nothing would keep him from getting there. He had a destiny, and surely God would see it fulfilled.

It wasn't until morning that Henry began to truly fear whether he was on the right track,

He'd strayed from the paved road leading to the place where the car was parked, because he wanted to remain as incognito as possible should the driver prove to be a bad person and come back to find him to do bad things to him, so he'd kept to the grass beside the road. He'd imagined he would be able to hide amongst the shrubs and garbage lining the road and eventually jump back to the pavement when out of view of the place where the car was parked, but he hadn't counted on the road turning away from his path



and leaving him alone in a field. But that was where he was, and that was why he was now fearful that he would ever make it to the ocean.

He wanted to cry, but no tears came. He wanted to scream for help but he couldn't. He wanted to tremble so God could see his pain and step in to help, but he had no blood. So he kept walking as he screamed inside for help.

Help didn't take long to come.

The beating of wings against the air was all the warning he had. One moment he was trudging along like the most wretched of souls, lost to the world, and the very next, he was sailing through the air in the sticky, hot mouth of a seagull.

Or he thought it was a seagull.

It was warm and rather moist where he sat, and he felt no ground beneath his feet.

It was, in fact, a seagull, and it was headed for one particular location. The location, was the one to which its entire flock had headed while this particular seagull had been sleeping in a carb-induced coma from too many burger buns at a Drumheller McDonald's dumpster. This particular seagull was embarrassed by its gluttony and its subsequent separation from its flock. It was frantic. It was moving quickly, and it was in the mood to commit a good deed or two on its way.

Henry had no idea what the motives of his new captor might be, but he, being a pragmatist, assumed the worst almost immediately and began to weep silently in the mouth of the seagull as they tore together through the air like a missile headed for a particularly ripe submarine full of sleeping sailors.

Henry prayed. He didn't quite know how to pray, or whether the prayers of a bead person would be heard by a God who made music and mountains and oceans, but he

prayed just the same. He said he was sorry for leaving his home, no matter how neglected he might have been. He said he was sorry for leaving the car with the nice driver who had picked him up, simply because he'd had a scary dream. He prayed for forgiveness for the plants he'd trampled on during his deviation from the road. He was filthy and horrible and he knew it, and if he'd had eyes, he'd have gouged them out.

It was a very dark night for Henry.

But the next morning, Henry swore he could smell the sea.

He couldn't of course, because he had no nose, but he swore it just the same. The air was cooler somehow, and the feeling of possibility swelled in his upper chest bead as if he were a young bride standing on a beach in ancient Greece, watching the sails of the ships rise slowly over the horizon, returning her husband to her...or not?

He smiled. But didn't.

The seagull, indifferent to Henry's hopes, simply kept on flying towards the beach where his flock was situated. Most of them were bickering over a slightly mouldy but mostly tasty bagel, and the seagull sighed inwardly as he realized he would not have to face an angry inquisition from twenty or so relatives. He would miss out on the bagel, but he would be able to slip in undetected and his gluttony from the previous McDonald's would go unnoticed. He was safe. His good deed had been recognized.

He smiled. He opened his mouth to let Henry out.

Henry paused, unable to read the seagull's thoughts and unsure whether it was a trap. The seagull stamped impatiently in place, but kept his mouth open. Henry breathed. But didn't.

Finally, gingerly, he reach one foot out of the seagull's mouth and onto the surface of the bench which was marked with the initials of decades of young lovers, some of them dead by now. He pulled the rest of himself out of the seagull's mouth, and smiled up at the creature's beady eyes; in his head at least.

The creature stared at him for a moment, possibly considering eating Henry, or communicating a simple "you're welcome" in his own way. Whichever it was, Henry couldn't quite tell.

Then the seagull flew away, leaving Henry along on the bench.

Henry smiled, but he didn't. He had made it! He was only meters away from the Pacific Ocean! He could smell the salt and the kelp; only he couldn't.

He shimmied down the front of the bench, or rather fell onto the sand, and stood up to survey his surroundings. This was useless of course because he had no eyes, but he imagined the sea to be expanding beyond him like an endless, blue paradise filled with dancing, singing creatures and waves as tall as the sky.

He ran, or as close to ran as he could, and plopped into the surf like the turd from a dog making its last mark on the world before disappearing into the confines of its owner's car.

He splashed, he sang, he wept with joy; only he didn't.

He thanked God for letting him be alive, even though he wasn't, and he sang at the top of his lungs of the beauty and generousness of the world, only he couldn't.

He looked about for a surfboard, and after finding a small piece of bark and deciding it was adequate, mounted the piece of discarded tree skin and set off into the water.

He could hear music from a stereo on the beach, and laughter from his fellow surfers. He knew he was amongst the greatest surfers in the world, because he could hear the waves and tell that they were the highest that the sea could make. He could hear the laughter and the calls, and for a moment it didn't matter that he was made of beads because everyone was soaking wet and half-submerged, and no one could tell who was who or what was what.

He laughed out loud; only he didn't.

He waved at his fellow surfers, but they didn't see.

But he didn't care.

The wind was rushing over his bead hat and the water was splashing against his bead legs. This was what he was created for, he knew in an instant; this was why there was thread tying his beads together, making him a person. He shrieked in his head and felt sure that someone heard him.

Suddenly a giant wave, a wave bigger than the rest of them hit him broadside and dumped him over his piece of bark.

He hung; suspended for a moment in the water, enjoying the feeling of flying, feeling certain he could stay there forever.

And he could, too, being that he was made of beads.

He smiled, or thought he did. He thanked God for the moment. He didn't see the reef shark coming his way.

The reef shark swam up to him, tasted Henry through its gills, then swallowed him whole.

It was warm in the fish belly, warmer than Henry had ever been, and as his beads dissolved and his thread turned to fish poop, he thanked God for letting him be so warm. It was almost, Henry imagined, like being loved.