



# SON OF FRED

A novel by  
**Richard and Esther Provencher**

An Early Reader story for ages 7-9

E-mail: [richardprov1@netscape.net](mailto:richardprov1@netscape.net)

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## Chapter One - A Father's Son...

My name is Shawn. But I like son of Fred. I'm almost ten years old. SOON.

At school they say Names about me. What does Mentally Challenged mean?

In the morning my hair is messy. It's brown, like cow pies. CHUCKLE. I use four fingers to make a rake.

Now my hair tumbles over my forehead, like Niagara Falls. I went there once.

SCHOOSH. The water falls and falls. SPLASHING ALL OVER!

My head is shaped like a football. So I yell LOUD when our team plays. At school, I mean. And my eyes look like black diamonds. RAHH.

One kid said I look ugly. But I run faster than him, so there. Maybe I can be a movie star. That will fool him. YESSS.

I make funny faces in the mirror. Half my teeth show when I GROWL. At school they laugh AT ME. And laugh. More names. BULLIES!

I'm a skinny dude. When I walk fast I flap my hands like a bird. HA...HA.

I have two friends, my foster parents. Mr. And Mrs. are nice but sometimes I get mixed up. "Dad, are you lost?"

Fred didn't come to visit for a long time. That's my dad's name. FRED!

I miss him.

## Chapter Two - Early Morning Time...

Shawn sat quietly looking around. The sun was warm on his thin arms. Creaking sounds came from the backyard rope swing.

His feet kicked lazily at the earth.

"My dad coming today?" he asked the Blue Jay that flew by three times. Shawn liked to talk to birds.

In fact he did it quite often.

He was glad for the company. Sometimes chick-a-dees and woodpeckers came by. And squirrels too.

Shawn looked up at the sky. "Why is it so blue? Hi sky! Hi blue!" He must ask his favorite teacher, Miss Silver on Monday.

But today is Saturday. He enjoys getting up before his foster parents. And it is a 'Super-Duper' treat to see the early morning sun.

It always had a wink just for him.

But his eyes hurt when he looked up, and saw its large orange smile.

"Did you know you are a morning person?" Miss Silver once said.

He liked her. And he knew she liked him. "Nice lady," he thought.

Shawn got off the swing and walked around the yard. He liked living in Truro, Nova Scotia. And being so close to Victoria Park with lots and lots of acres.

Maybe hundreds.

At night floodlights could be seen through his window. Their glare lit up four tennis courts and made it seem like daytime.

Even until snooze-time he stared through his window at the forest. Most of the beautiful tall trees were pine. To Shawn they looked more like Popsicle sticks reaching up.

Or they could be the same as fingers wagging at him.

Nighttime was always full of darkness. It was like a huge blanket that covered everything. But still could not hide bright stars that kept calling him. "What are you waiting for?" they seemed to ask.

"I'M COMING!" was his answer in a loud voice.

As Shawn lay each night in bed, lips whispered, "I *am* coming."

Right now in his backyard, arms slapped at his sides. If only he was a bird and fly away.

Shawn tried flapping his arms. It might be easier if he wasn't so heavy. Then he could travel over the tallest trees.

And have a better chance to find his dad.

"Why doesn't Fred visit as often as before?" Shawn asked the wind.

The boy's thoughts traveled quicker than fireflies. His brown hair hung loosely over a thin face. When Shawn shook his head from side to side, it meant he was happy.

Like right now, because he had a plan. YESSS.

His foster parents wanted him to play outside, and get a tan on his face. It also got him away from the TV set. But he wasn't allowed to wander outside the yard.

At school some kids called him "Ghost." Or, "Hey retard!"

Shawn spent too much time watching everyone else have fun. He always sat by himself, listening and not playing.

"I am like a shadow," he mumbled too often.

What was a "retard" anyway? The words hurt, especially when others laughed. "LOUD too," he said.

"Hey you!" Shawn answered back one day. "NAMES AND FACES!" And those mean-mouthed kids laughed even more.

It wasn't polite. He knew because his foster parents were teaching him things. And he listened carefully. The school said he was "Mentally challenged." But Shawn didn't agree.

"I am not mental!" came like fire from his lips.

## Chapter Three - Time To Go...

"SHAWN? ARE YOU WEARING A SWEATER?" Both questions traveled like hornets from the front door to the backyard.

His foster mother made loud sounds when she was upset. "She's a mad nag," he mumbled biting into his lip.

"Oh, oh, time to go in." He didn't want to go in right now. Just being outside and thinking good thoughts made him feel good.

And he was not even a teensy bit cold.

"Aren't you hungry?" his foster mother asked. She looked at him, head bent to one side, grinning back at her.

How come she always asked that? Shawn wondered. She wouldn't be so smarty-smart if she knew what he was thinking.

Now his thoughts scrambled around, like eggs for breakfast.

This morning he had checked in the mirror. And tried to grin like her. But he couldn't. He had to be very, very happy to look like that.

And he wasn't that happy. Well, maybe almost.

He didn't have a home, just for him and his dad...Fred. Yes, just for a dad and a son, like him, son of Fred.

Shawn's mouth twisted into a funny shape. And only half his teeth showed. He looked like a dog ready to bite.

"GROWL," came from his mouth.

But he wasn't like that. Inside his chest he was lonely for Fred. Somehow, Shawn had to find his dad. He had plans. "Coming. I'm coming, dad."

"I thought you would be extra hungry this morning," his foster mother said sweetly.

His thoughts went crashing into little pieces. Shawn tried his half dog smile. But it didn't come out right.

Not a good idea to be angry right now.

No time for lots of talk now. I have to make plans. To do things, he thought.

Shawn kept clenching and unclenching his fingers. And rubbed them along his jeans. Sometimes they slapped at his sides.

"Shucks," he answered finally. "I ate one, two... NO, three toast. I'm okay. I have to go now."

"Pancakes and sausages?" his foster mother teased. "Say, yes."

He licked his lips. His mind could tell him things. "Yes...Yes," even though right now his lips kept shut.

"Come on. You can't turn down pancakes. With pure maple syrup?"

Shawn lifted his eyebrows. And his mouth watered. But he had plans. When his mind was made up, it was made up.

"Oh good, good. I like pancakes. But not to-day," he said.

"Are you going for a little hike around the yard, Shawn?" Her smile floated over him like a warm wind.

He liked his foster parents but why are they so kind? Do they want me to forget my dad?

"I'm going no place," he answered.

"Where?"

"No place."

"You mean nowhere don't you? But you have to go somewhere, Shawn." She always corrected him. And he hated that.

He got mixed up with his talking fast.

"I am not a retard," was the message zipping through his brain.

"It's okay Shawn. I'm just trying to help. Now try it. Nowhere."

"No-where." He said it very slowly.

"Wasn't that easy?"

She didn't ask why his knapsack was so full. Maybe she doesn't care if he runs away.

He had to hurry.

Somewhere, his dad is waiting.

Chapter Four - Around About Then ...

Are you running away? His thoughts asked.

Yes, he answered to himself.

Why?

"I have to find my dad," he whispered. Two voices inside his head had a wrestling match. It was like an action movie video.

Which one should he listen to?

"Dad, I'm coming." The thought had been building in his mind for the past two weeks. It was something he just had to do.

And he also had to prove he wasn't afraid. Not one little bit. Even if everyone called him, "Slow," or "Retard."

"Dad...Fred. I'm coming." His heart hammered. Fingers clenched and unclenched. His knees must have springs, because both legs felt bouncy as a rubber ball.

"Me. Not Shawn. I'm coming. Me, I'm son of Fred. That's my real neat name." He opened the door and stepped into a bright-shiny day.

His tummy was full of pancakes.

He said "Hi sun," once again.

Nearby, a big fat crow answered with a flap of wings.

Except Shawn called them "Flying Houses." They were so huge their wings seemed barely able to keep them in the air.

He liked making up new names. He was smart. He wanted to show everyone. He was Son of Fred.

And he could fly like the crows if he wanted.

Chapter Five - At Victoria Park...

It was a short walking distance down the street. Shawn's new sneakers seemed to fly along the sidewalk.

Kids playing soccer noticed the scooting boy. He was wearing his blue cap with WILSON'S OIL printed on the front.

"Watch where you're going!" one shouted.

"It's that scared-cat kid," another added.

Speedy feet turned Shawn into an, 'Indy-500' boy. His short-sleeved blue and white striped shirt whipped in the wind. His best blue jeans were like a streak of movement.

And his knapsack bobbed up and down.

Shawn didn't have any friends. He was always laughed at, and he was tired of people feeling sorry for him.

He was running to escape, to the forest. Maybe it might even lead to the ocean. His dad might be there.

Speedy feet dug in and began to pick up speed. Arms moved around in circles like two windmills.

Everyone told him he needed to have foster parents. Some said his dad didn't care about him. Shawn knew they were 'Make-Up' stories.

They even said his dad wasn't coming to visit anymore.

NOT TRUE!

He didn't believe them.

His dad was lost. That's all.

His feet moved faster. Shawn's sneakers were like roller blades. ZOOM! ZOOM!  
They seemed to shout on the asphalt walkway.

People told him, "you poor little boy. So lucky to have someone to look after you."  
The Children's Aid had placed him in this foster home.

Maybe I'll be there forever and ever, he once thought.

Did dad want him to stay there? He wondered.

It was supposed to be only temporary, until Fred finished working for the summer in  
the North West Territories. But the boy didn't understand.

Shawn's little boy heart was afraid.

Forever was a too long time.

He closed his ears to their 'Talk-Talk.' He shut his eyes to their sneaky smiles. The  
wind flew at him like a jet plane.

People stopped to watch.

Was that Batman? Little kids wondered.

Shawn opened his heart to the trees, and the children's playground. He ran to the  
swings and their swaying. His heart was thumping.

After skipping along, he sat himself in one for a rest.

He knew he was somebody.

He was Son of Fred.

It was exciting. It felt like he could fly. His legs pumped faster and faster. Some  
people standing below looked up. All they could see was a pair of sneakers dancing in the  
air.

His shirt flapped like a flag behind him. Pants filled with air, almost like sails on a ship.

Visitors to the park saw his smile. And heard his singsong.

"I am Me. I am Son of Fred."

And they walked away, smiling too.

He was scooting higher than a kite. Now he knew he could do it. He could...he would.

Find Fred.

Chapter Six - Finding a Dad...

Shawn's trip was something he thought of for awhile. He had to find his dad. He must be lost. He never comes to visit any more.

Then he remembered.

The last time Shawn received a visit, dad had tears in his eyes. Now he just had to find him.

Shawn was on a journey of discovery.

Two 'flying houses' watched busy arms slap happily by his sides.

The boy lifted his head and looked way back. He was sure he could hear his house whisper, "Be careful Shawn. Come home when you are ready. Good luck, Shawn."

He slowly stepped off the swing.

Sneakers got a good grip in the sand. And Shawn seemed taller as he headed into the park woods.

He crossed over rocks in the stream, careful not to get his feet wet. And moved closer to a bridge.

Something reflected from the water. It was glass. A pop bottle just lay there, waiting for someone to smash it.

He wouldn't let them. "No. No way." And stooped down to get it.

"Hey mom, that kid is cleaning up around the creek. Okay if I help him?"

"Not right now," Shawn heard the mother say.

He looked up. Imagine, someone wanted to do something he was doing. Like protecting the earth. It made him feel important. "Good...good." Dad would be proud of him.

Now Shawn headed off to Jacob's ladder.

It was one place he wanted to try on his own. 132 wooden steps were built against the rocky hillside. The last time here, his foster parents had to hold his hand.

He had been so afraid.

Now that he was alone, he must climb it himself. "WATCH ME GO, DAD!" he thundered at the sky-full of white clouds.

"Look at me Fred!" he shouted at the first step.

He felt light-headed counting the steps as they headed up. And up.

Wooden handrails followed him on his journey. No turning back now, was a thought that urged him on. He had to make it on his own.

And he would. He could.

"YES I CAN!" Shawn shouted.

His feet stomped on the stairs. "Noise, noise, I am making noise." And brave feet thumped loudly as he climbed triumphantly.

Imagine, Shawn made it to the top all by himself.

He knew Fred would be so proud.

He was a brave Son of Fred.

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Chapter Seven - Lots Of Fun...

Victoria Park was really huge. Now that he was alone, it seemed more like a jungle. It was filled with noises and other strange sounds and...danger?

"No. That was a partridge." He knew the word from his student encyclopedia. Shawn laughed. "Floppy-Joe" was the new name he gave it. Its wings beat faster and faster.

Now it was up and gone away.

He tried to copy its quick movements. Shawn began flapping his own arms, as quickly as he could. "I'M FREE!" he shouted at the sky.

"I'M SON OF FRED!"

There was no one to say, "Be careful." Or, "Don't do that you noisy boy."

His life had been full of rules even though his foster parents were kind. "But strict!" he laughed out loud. He liked to laugh.

And his strong voice echoed down the trail.

Shawn was not used to making happy noises past his backyard. Now he was so noisy, several boys from school began to follow him.

His anxious feet headed for the Wishing Well.

It was on the other side of the boardwalk bridge. And there was only one special wish to make.

It burst out of his mind and fell with his penny into the well. It felt good to say the words.

"I want to find my dad Fred."

His coin swirled down and down, landing with a THUNK!

Later he made his way along the creek bank, noticing foam flecks by a logjam. The slow current accepted his flung stone. 'KER-SPLASH!'

"KER-SPLASH!" he repeated. "KER-SPLASH! KER-SPLASH! Ha. Ha. Ha!" His voice bounced along the riverbed.

"Hey," he shouted at the water. "I'm Me. I'm son of Fred."

Some boys following him were quite surprised. They couldn't help but wonder. Shawn? Alone in the park, and not even hanging onto the boardwalk rail, like he usually did?

By now the trail climbed higher upon the rising hill.

They remembered his screams of fear in the past. And that was even when his foster parents were there.

Now the boys were simply amazed. And began to circle him quietly. Almost like three cats after a mouse. Here he was, alone. And no foster parents to protect him.

"Far out," they said to each other with high fives. Bugging him was going to be fun.

"Hey Shawn! What're you doing here? All by yourself!" they yelled.

Maybe they could have some fun with him. Like, push him around a little. And take that smile off his face.

The three boys huddled together as they worked out a plan.

"Hi guys! Can I play too?" His quick question took them by surprise.

Once he was fearful whenever they came around. His smile was full of teeth.

It wasn't a crooked smile anymore.

It wasn't a scared-cat smile either. Nor even a pretend smile. It was a brave 'Son of Fred' smile.

It was a huge, HUGE smile.

It was a laughing, monster smile.

"Who needs him?" One of the boys asked. "Come on let's beat it. He's weird anyway." The others hesitated, not sure what to do.

"Want to come with us, Shawn?" asked one boy with a smug look on his face. "That's if you're brave enough to hike to Waddell Falls."

"If you're not a baby-face," the oldest boy added.

"Why not guys? Give the kid a break. He proved he could be a brave little guy," another said.

"I don't know," said the third boy. "Let's rough him up instead. Yah, give him a bloody nose."

The conversation flowed back and forth like a river. And a little shouting took place between the boys as they argued.

Then one of the boys gave him a shove. But Shawn stood his ground.

Another placed his face close to Shawn, and growled.

But Shawn's morning GROWL was louder.

## Chapter Eight - Plans Are Made...

"My fist is a hammer," Shawn said, holding up his chin. He tried making an angry face but he couldn't.

The boys looked at his skinny knuckles and it cracked them up.

These same fellows used to call him names. And often teased him at school. Now they were confused. He wasn't running off bawling to someone.

"Get away you Bullies...Huh," Shawn said, staring them down.

Maybe because he showed he could be brave. Or, it could be because knocking him around wouldn't prove anything.

The boys just looked at him, unsure what to do.

"Yes, yes," he said. "Waddell Falls. No more scared-cat. Let's scat!"

Now they weren't laughing at him. They were laughing with him. He was coming across as a cool kind of guy.

Shawn was soon running alongside as everyone raced up more steps to the waterfall. This time he was 'friends' with friends. The air was noisy with their yelling.

No more 'Retard.'

No more funny-looking boy, he thought.

Shawn was just a boy with friends.

And Son of Fred loved it.

Shouting and chasing each other became a game. And they wrestled in fun on the grass. These boys had names. Nathan, George and Sam.

Now Shawn had three friends.

He told them about his plan to find Fred.

"You're running away?" They asked, shocked.

"No, it's for my dad. I'm just looking for my dad." Shawn pulled his baseball cap down tighter. No one was going to change his plan.

"Help me find my dad...Fred?" he asked. They listened.

"We'll look for a little while. And then take you back home. OK?"

"A-okay," Shawn answered. He smiled his smile. Then he gave them his right hand thumbs up sign. It was his lucky thumb.

The afternoon was super, as 'friends' became 'better friends.' Four boys were now working together to search all the trails.

It was a busy time since Victoria Park was filled with people.

Family picnics were going on everywhere. There were children playing Frisbee, some even roller-skating. And a few doing tricks on their skateboards.

Now Shawn was part of the noise and fun time.

"Over here!" Shawn shouted over and over. And his new friends ran and helped check behind the work shed. Even behind the swimming pool, and around piles of lumber.

Or anywhere else their new friend pointed. Everyone was like a detective seeking a fresh trail.

While they searched all over, they still had time for fun. The boys even pretended Shawn's dad was kidnapped. Soon it became a game of 'hide-and-seek,' with a new name.

And it was called, "Find Fred."

Unknown to Shawn, he was gaining their respect. They could see he was able to laugh at himself. And was interested in everything he saw.

He even taught them new names he gave the birds.

They joined in his laughing, as he pointed to fat crows scooting overhead. "Flying houses" he called them.

Could they be friends with Shawn at school, too? Shawn wondered. They might tell others he was an A-okay guy.

But these were questions for later.

Right now he was having too much fun. Son of Fred was a busy-busy boy. And he raced ahead shouting, "First to the top of the hill!!"

## Chapter Nine - Back To Start ...

"Shawn!"

A boy's fun time finally came to an end. It was as if a lightning bolt dropped from the big, blue sky. His hair stood straight up.

He clasped both hands together, and squeezed his eyes shut. "No...No...No," he repeated. At first, he felt like crying. But not now, no more baby time.

"Shawn?" the voice was closer now. It traveled like an arrow piercing his skin. One eye peeked open.

Would fun-time memories just fade away? Was this afternoon for nothing at all? Thought Shawn.

Skinny arms dropped limply by his sides. His jaw hung like a little sad sack. Grass stains on his new jeans might also mean trouble.

"Would they come out in the Wish-Wash?" he wondered.

"Come here Shawn," his foster father called.

The other three boys hung back, wondering if their friend was in bad trouble. After all, he wasn't allowed alone out of his yard.

They watched his shoulders slump even further.

Shawn walked slowly towards his foster parents then stopped.

"Poor kid," his new friends, said one to one another. They remembered the same look when they were mean to him at school.

Perhaps they should say something. After all, he was now their pal. Maybe they could change. No more saying "Weirdo" or "Retard."

He was 'cool,' a real fun guy.

"It's okay, he's with us," one of the boys said, stepping forward.

"We're friends," the other two added.

Shawn looked around. He never 'friends' like this before. He smiled his special smile. Both eyes grew from small buttons to large saucers.

They were sticking up for him?

The boy looked back at his foster dad. Was he angry as a crocodile? Shawn's hair was smeared over his forehead. And his pants had muddy smudges on the knees.

"Am I in trouble, deep trouble?" he asked.

His friends just watched, not sure what to say. One of them gave a 'thumbs-up' sign. Shawn knew that meant good-luck, for him.

His shirt was open where two buttons had been torn off. He lost them in that wrestling match just a short while ago. "Oh, oh, bad time now," he said as both foster parents stood before him.

There was even blood on his nose. But his smile was so bright.

And his eyes sparkled with happiness, even if his chin tried to lean on his chest. But he wouldn't let it.

His heart was traveling a "Thump...Thump" road.

Both foster parents smiled as three boys moved closer to stand beside Shawn. "Are they really your friends?" they asked Shawn.

"Yes," he answered. "My good, new friends."

Both adults listened carefully, as each boy took turns telling about their adventures in the park. The foster parents were astonished. A few tears tumbled down worried cheeks.

What they heard made them feel so proud.

Shawn glowed like a light bulb as the boys spoke up for him. They saw his confidence grow in the tale telling. Shoulders straightened.

This was definitely a new boy who stood confidently before them.

Now it was Shawn's turn to talk.

"I went up, all the way, up Jacob's ladder. I wasn't afraid. "No. No more," he added.

He didn't have to put a GROWL on his face. Shawn just scratched his head with both hands.

And his wide smile showed all his teeth.

## Chapter Ten - More Happy Times...

His friends remained silent as the boy spoke. Even his stuttering seemed to be less noticeable. They were getting to like their new friend, Shawn, even more.

It might take a while for him to fit in better at school.

But, they would be there to help.

"I even went up to the Lookout," Shawn said. "Right to the top, all by myself." He told his foster parents about the wish he made when he dropped his penny into the wishing well.

"KERPLUNK," he said remembering the splash.

"I said, Fred, I can't find you. Come and find me, your son. OK?"

Instead, it had been his foster parents who had found him. That was okay, though. He knew they must have been worried.

"Do one of you boys have a watch?" his foster dad asked suddenly.

The sound of his voice was like a knife cutting through a watermelon. But the tone was gentle. And he didn't even have a frown on his face.

Shawn looked around, licking his lips. He glanced at his foster mom. She sent him back a happy face. And blew him a fast kiss.

She didn't look upset.

"Sure. I have one." Nathan said quickly.

"Can you make sure Shawn is home by 5 PM?" the man asked. "For supper. It would be a shame to bring him home right now. Especially when he's having so much fun with his friends."

“NEW FRIENDS!” Shawn yelled back. He could hardly believe his ears. "I'm free," he said. "I'm me!" he shouted.

"I'm son of Fred!"

“Boys, you’re welcome to join us later for a supper barbecue,” said Shawn’s foster mother. “After you ask your parents.”

Shawn waved BYE-BYE as he left with his friends for more fun.

Then he raced towards Jacob’s Ladder.

Chapter Eleven - A Sleepy Head...

During supper there was much laughter in Shawn's house. He told a whole barrel of cheerful stories, about today.

Each detail was told and retold, over and over.

Shawn was in his glory.

“Goodness, a GOOD day,” Shawn said. These were new words in his vocabulary.

And yes, good feelings did move easily around the living room. It was like a story-party.

About friends and sights and the way a boy feels about his dad.

And Shawn knew Fred would come to visit SOON! he shouted. Then he gave lots of hugs to his foster parents, before heading up to his room.

Just before sleepy-eye time, he watched the moon through his window. Stars kept blinking like when Shawn had dust in his eye.

Today's great memories kept buzzing around in his head. After all that searching, he didn't find his dad...Fred.

But he did find something else very important.

And they're coming for sausages and pancakes in the morning.

THREE NEW FRIENDS!

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Re: SON OF FRED. One day my wife and I visited a residence for mentally challenged children where I had an interview for a supervisory position. As we walked about the corridors, we noticed a young lad about ten, sitting on his chair alone and as we stood by his open doorway, he called out, “Come in.” And we did.

We had a nice chat about his living conditions and he told us he had no friends. And that he was waiting for his dad, Fred, to come visit. He hoped his father would come today, since he had not been around for a while and the boy missed him immensely. Before leaving, I asked the boy what his name was. His response through a beautiful smile: "Son of Fred." We rushed home and began this book.