

PRESS RELEASE

**Minnesota Attorney Takes a Giant Leap of Faith to Pursue a Lifelong Dream**

(St. Paul) – Just five years ago, Mark Ristau of St. Paul, Minn., was in the prime of his career as a corporate attorney. Then what many would call a roadblock popped up. His company was forced to downsize in the wake of a major acquisition, and he was laid off.

What most would consider a hardship, Ristau considered a blessing in disguise. He suddenly had a severance package and the funds needed to take a few years off and work full time on the novel that had been burning a hole in his soul for almost his entire life.

Beaver’s Pond Press of Edina, Minn., will release *A Hero Dreams* in the fall of 2017. It is a book that explores, through the eyes of a child, the age-old problem of violence in our world. The story begins with a prologue in which four-year-old Ricky Williamson sees an angel after nearly drowning in a swimming pool in Florida. She tells the boy, “Something’s wrong. And together, we’re going to make it right.”

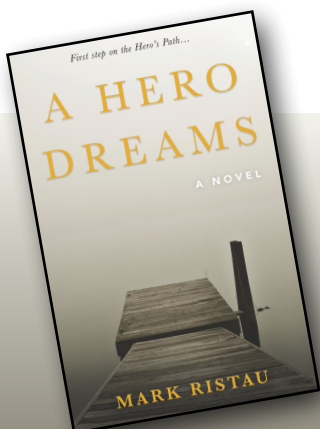
The “something” that’s wrong is not Ricky, of course, but the violent world into which he’s been born.

The angel’s words set the stage for the journey that begins when the boy is ten and headed off to summer camp. While at camp, Ricky finds himself trapped in a place where bullying is common, it’s considered normal to laugh at the misfortunes of others, and violence rears its ugly head on a daily basis.

“After Ricky becomes a victim of a terrible act of violence, he comes to the realization that, even though he’s surrounded by darkness, there’s a spark—a spark of hope for a better tomorrow. What makes my protagonist a hero is that, in spite of the hate and violence he encounters, he has the courage to endure. And, he insists on being true to himself and the beliefs instilled upon him by his deceased father, regardless of what the outside world is telling him,” said Ristau, who as all good authors do worked his own personal experiences into the book.

Like Ricky, Ristau lost his father at a young age. He too nearly drowned in a Florida swimming pool when he was a child, and he once had a weapon pulled on him by a bigger, tougher kid who threatened to kill him. “I think at the highest level, this book tells a story that delves into the very darkest realms of the human psyche. It explores the issue of violence through the eyes of a child, and points to the possibility of peace in our time,” said Ristau.

Now that *A Hero Dreams* is finished, Ristau is working on his next novel, *Beyond the Threshold*. The story will begin with Ricky waking up on an unfamiliar shore, then meeting the one person who may be capable of healing his wounded heart. But when an alarming truth is revealed, it puts his friendship with this person to the test and forever changes his life.



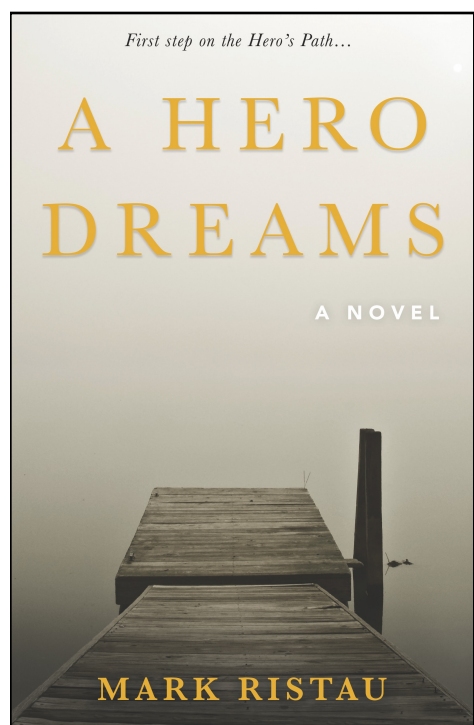
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MARK RISTAU

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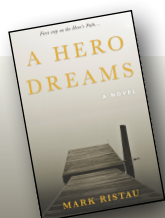
The series will conclude with *A Hero Soars*, in which Ricky returns from his adventure and sees the world through a new set of eyes. He is now free to live a life that will inspire others, and free to make choices with profound implications for the future of mankind.

*A Hero Dreams* will be available for purchase online through both Amazon.com and Barnes and Noble.com. The book can also be pre-ordered at stores everywhere. For more information, check out the author's website: [www.markristau.com](http://www.markristau.com).

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** To arrange an interview with Mark Ristau, or request a review copy of his novel, *A Hero Dreams*, contact Rachel M. Anderson, Publicist, RMA Publicity, 952-240-2513 or [rachel@rmapublicity.com](mailto:rachel@rmapublicity.com).



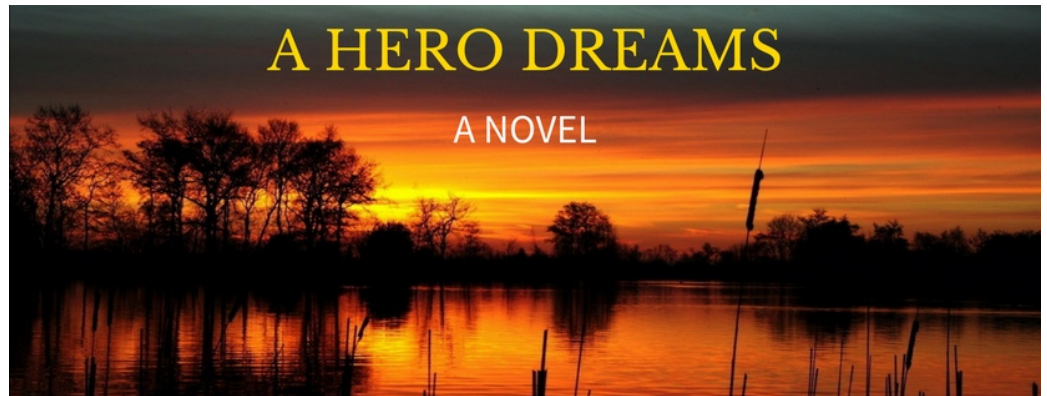
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Mark Ristau took a giant leap of faith when he left his career of 20 years as a corporate attorney to tell a story that had burned inside him for most of his life. Selling his house and most of his personal belongings in late 2011, he packed his car and migrated from Minnesota to Southwest Florida.

He settled in Naples, the setting for the story's prologue, which recounts an actual event from Mark's childhood. Five years and dozens of drafts later, *A Hero Dreams*, the first novel in the Hero's Path series, was ready for publication. Minnesota publisher Beaver's Pond Press will release the novel in Fall 2017.

When the story begins, readers are introduced to a young boy who is grieving the death of his father. It isn't long, however, before the boy embarks on a quest for inner peace.

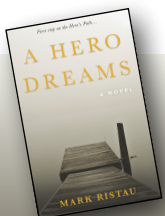
Ristau is currently working on Book Two in the series, which will take that theme to another level. At the age of 35, the boy is now a grown man. Bearing scars that serve as a painful reminder of the past, he's abandoned his search for inner peace. He feels he's been treated unfairly, and we find him plotting his revenge. Book Three will explore an alternative timeline in which the boy makes different decisions—decisions with a global impact.

An avid reader and film buff, Mark Ristau is particularly fond of stories that fill hearts with hope and minds with the idea that anything is possible. His favorite book is *To Kill a Mockingbird* and his favorite movie is *The Shawshank Redemption*.

He credits his daily yoga practice with keeping his head clear and his life in balance during the writing process. Born in Chicago, Ristau attended elementary school in South Orange, N. J. before his family moved to St. Paul, Minn. when he was 11. He currently lives in St. Paul.

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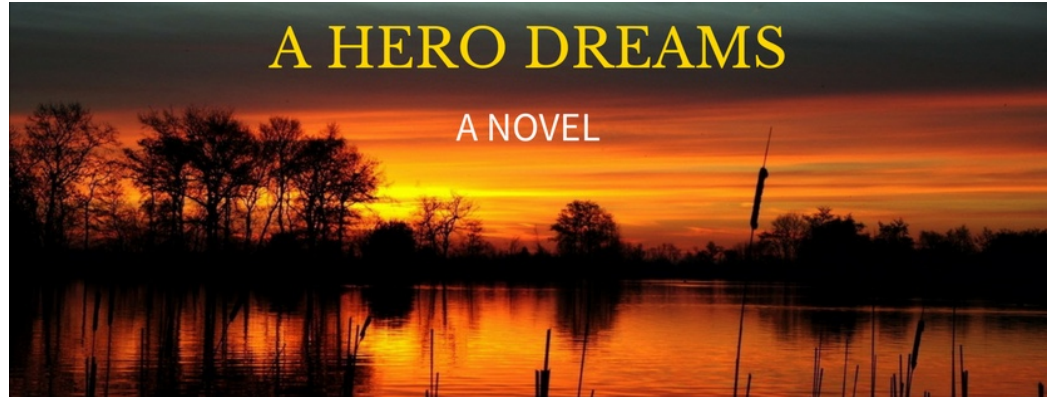
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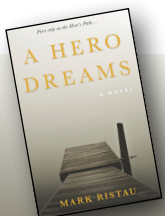
## SUGGESTED QUESTIONS



- 1) Why did you decide to leave the corporate world to pursue a career as an author?
- 2) What are the major themes explored in your novel?
- 3) Parts of your novel are based on personal experiences. How hard was it to share details of your own life with the general public?
- 4) What are you hoping will be the main takeaways from your book?
- 5) Now that *A Hero Dreams* is out, what's next for you?
- 6) What's next for your character, Ricky?

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## TESTIMONIALS

“*A Hero Dreams* is a stunning blend of the all-too-real life of little Ricky, not yet ten years old, and the surreal world he creates for himself to survive . . . Beautiful images and scenes contrast with the hardness and brutality of real life to create a montage of what existence and survival is like for one, lonely little boy. A fine read for the drama, and the poetry will stay with you for a long time.”

–Judith Koll Healey, author of *The Canterbury Papers* and *The Rebel Princess* and the forthcoming, *Becket: The Murder Book*

“An elegantly written and heart wrenching tale that transports readers to a time not so long ago, and yet a lifetime away. Ristau leaves us wanting to devour the next installment in the series.”

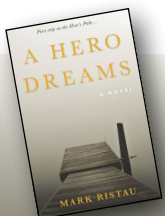
–Stephen Yoch, award-winning author of *Becoming George Washington*

“*A Hero Dreams* takes us from the relatively normal childhood of Ricky Williamson—to a point where he must decide whether to allow the sorrows of the world to burden him or whether to step free into a magical place where all is possible. Mark Ristau has written a lovely book that tantalizes us with the line between reality and all that might be beyond.”

–Mary Logue, author of the *Claire Watkins Mysteries* and *Sleep Like a Tiger*

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## FEATURE ARTICLE

### What Will it Take to End Violence in Our World?

By Rachel M. Anderson, Contributing Writer

(St. Paul) – There are many who say war is inevitable, given the current climate in the world. North Korea is testing nuclear weapons, and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is threatening the safety and security of cities throughout the world.

Despite it all, Mark Ristau, an attorney who makes his home in St. Paul, Minn., believes peace is possible. “The violence will stop,” he says, “when we embrace the simple truth that each of us is an integral part of an interconnected, interdependent whole. Make no mistake about it—I’m talking about a global transformation of consciousness. To get there, we need to start small. I think a good first step is to tell stories that touch the human heart and resonate with people on a deeply intuitive, visceral level.”

That concept was the motivation behind Ristau’s decision to accept a severance package when his company downsized in 2011, and pursue his dream of becoming an author. Minnesota publisher Beaver’s Pond Press plans to release his debut novel, *A Hero Dreams*, in Fall 2017.

*A Hero Dreams* is the story of how a young boy views violence in the world. Ricky Williamson is eight-years-old when his father dies. He feels alone and is looking for direction in his life, but doesn’t know where to turn. His destiny reveals itself two years later in 1976 when his alcoholic mother sends him away to summer camp. It’s a place where bullying is common, and it’s considered normal to laugh at the misfortunes of others.

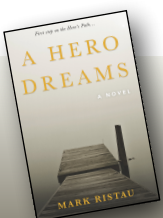
At the age of ten, Ricky becomes the victim of a terrible act of violence. In the aftermath, he has a remarkable experience where he talks to an angel, and another when he hears his father’s voice in his head. He is then transported across a threshold and into another world.

“Even though Ricky is subjected to this terrible act of violence, he doesn’t necessarily see the world as a bad place. He’s a sensitive, loving boy who’s hanging on to his ability to remain optimistic,” says Ristau. “I think it’s really important for us as readers to identify with and be on the side of the protagonist. We want to believe. We want to see that there is hope. Yes, there is darkness all around us, but why do we wake up each morning and continue on? It’s because in our hearts, we believe tomorrow will be better.”

During his research for the novel, Ristau studied the writings of Martin Luther King, who said, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

Throughout the civil rights movement, King urged his followers to respond to hate with love. In spite of the violent opposition they faced, King continued to believe in the power of love. He continued to believe in the essential goodness of mankind.

And just recently, in May 2017, Ben Ferencz, the last surviving Nuremberg prosecutor, who is now 97-years-old, seemed to hold a similar belief in his interview with CBS 60 Minutes journalist Lesley Stahl. The Nuremberg trials after World War II were the first international war crimes tribunals ever held. Ferencz is the man credited with bringing Hitler's top lieutenants to justice.



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When Stahl asked Ferencz if he thought the people who perpetrated war crimes were savages, he said, “These men would never have been murderers had it not been for the War... (they were) patriotic human being(s) acting in the interest of (their) country, in (their) mind(s).”

He went on to say the same thing about the man who dropped the nuclear bomb on Hiroshima. “Now I will tell you something very profound, which I have learned after many years. War makes murderers out of otherwise decent people. All wars, and all decent people.”

While condemning war, Ferencz seems, like King, to be holding on to the belief in the essential goodness of mankind.

Ristau calls Ferencz, a Hungarian-born American lawyer, a “true American hero,” and hopes readers will identify with his character, Ricky Williamson, as a hero too. “I wrote this book because I had a story to tell and thought if I could make a small, but not insignificant, difference in the world, I’m going to do it. I think that’s how change occurs. You share a story that inspires people to make different choices in their lives,” he says. “The more people you touch with your story, the greater the impact.”

The early reviews for *A Hero Dreams* have been very favorable. Stephen Yoch, the award-winning author of *Becoming George Washington* hails *A Hero Dreams* as, “An elegantly written and heart wrenching tale that transports readers to a time not so long ago, and yet a lifetime away. Ristau leaves us wanting to devour the next installment in the series.”

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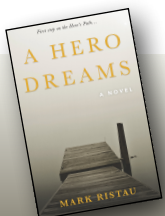
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