

# *Tiger Teen Detectives*

## *Finding The Boys*

by Richard C. Franklin, III

### *Chapter 1*

#### *New Kid on the Team*

“107. Richard Chee-ester Franklin the Thiiird!” yelled coach DiMedio.

“Here, coach. My friends just call me ‘Rich.’ ”

“Son, I don’t care how much money you have. I’m only interested in how you play football.”

“Sir, ‘Rich’ is simply short for Richard. ”

“Well, if you want be a talker rather than a football player, you better quit this football team and go down the hall to Ms. LeKerf’s Drama Club. I hear they wear *very pretty* frilled costumes.”

Once the entire football team had stopped laughing, DiMedio said “Since we have no actors on our team, son, why don’t we just call you ‘Chet.’ ”

So started my first day of football practice. It was in the heat of August and two weeks before school even started, but this “voluntary” “fun get-together” was a requirement if you wanted to play for the Bayview High Tigers. So here I am, a new kid, in a new school, and I already have a nickname I can’t stand.

“108. Aleeeex Daaaavis!”

“Yes, coach!” came a crisp response from the back row.

“I hope you’re like your Dad. He was tough when he played for me.”

There was no response.

After some more names and comments, Coach yelled, “All right girls, give me three laps as a ‘warm up.’ ”

Was he kidding? It’s 90 degrees!

After the laps, the Seniors led us in sit-ups, pushups, jumping jacks, and leg stretches to the point of exhaustion. With two loud tweets of his whistle, Assistant Coach Fernandez yelled “Gatorade!” I turned around and saw two men from Bay Deli, each with a hand truck with water and drinks. As we lined up, they handed out the chilled Gatorade and water. I grabbed a red one and sat next to a guy who had two blue drinks and another who was inhaling his bottle of water.

“I really needed this, I’m getting tired.”

“That’s why I got two. They’re free anyway.”

“That’s great, but isn’t it expensive for a little deli?”

“My cousin, Ben, says all the Tiger’s teams get free stuff from places in town. It’s just the way it is.”

“Well, this is certainly better than middle school,” I replied. “By the way, I’m ‘Rich.’ ”

“I don’t care how much money you have! Anyway, I’m Alex on the Freshman squad.”

“Very funny, Alex. Hi, I’m Jack, the Freshman quarterback.”

“Thanks, guys.” I took another swig of red Gatorade. “I think I’ll get some water. Either of you want one?”

As I went over to get a water, Coach DiMedio walked by. One of the Bay Deli men called out “Make sure you say where this came from.” The Coach sneered and hurried into the gym.

Coach Fernandez was smiling and talking to some of the players. “All right, guys, let’s *start* this practice.”

*Start?*

First came running patterns and various drills. Each combination had a number. The older guys knew the moves, but I was having trouble. It’s one thing playing fantasy football on a computer and another actually doing it.

I think I went left instead of right and suddenly there was a crash and a pile up. Coach DiMedio reappeared, frowned at me, and with a “dweet, dweet” of his whistle said “gather ‘round, team.” The entire squad came running over.

“Welcome to the proud history of Tiger football. I see many of you have gone soft over the summer. Well, we’re going to fix that or you’re outta here. Except, of course for the *freeeshmen*. The Board of Education says no cutting of *freeeshmen* because it will hurt

their self-*esteeeeeem*. Don't you boys worry...Coach Fernandez will work you so hard only the real men will want to stay. Now hit the showers!"

This guy is a lunatic. He is like a Marine drill sergeant character in some old movie. After fiddling with my locker, I took off my sweats, wrapped a towel around my waist and went to the shower room. It was one big room with 15 shower heads. No privacy. I washed, dressed and got out as fast as I could. As I walked out of the locker room, Alex said "Hey Richie, are you new in Bayview?"

"Yeah. We moved here from Philly last month."

"We also got a new house this summer," Alex said. "But my family has been here for generations."

"The coach certainly knows your Dad."

"Yeah. It's a pain. "

When we went outside, I said "See you tomorrow" and started walking uphill with my gym bag toward home.

"Later, Richie or Chet, which is it?"

"Whatever."

I was tired and the walk home is almost straight uphill. I put on my headphones and was listening to my play list. I had barely gotten through one song when a car stopped and Alex hollered "Chet, want a ride?"

"Sure!" I hopped into the backseat with my bag.

"Dad, this is Chet. He's a Freshman on the team."

"Chet, I'm Jeff Davis. Where do you live?"

"The house on the hill of Bayview Farms."

"The old Franklin house?"

"I guess so. It was my grandparents' house."

"Was your grandfather Junior Franklin, the publisher of the Gazette?"

“Yes, and my Dad is now running the paper.”

Mr. Davis stopped as we approached my driveway.

“Thanks for the ride” I said. “It sure beats walking after practice.”

“Later,” Alex said as I got out and walked up the driveway. I was too tired to do any more running. All I wanted was to sit down.

I entered the house quietly because Mom might be napping. As I got some cold lemonade, I read a note on the fridge in Dad’s handwriting:

*Richie, please light the Weber Grill and check the smoker. It should be 225°. We're having smoked ribs for dinner.*

Well, at least we’re having a good dinner. After lighting the grill, and seeing that the ribs in the smoker were perfect, I came inside. Music was coming from Mom’s “office,” so I went upstairs.

“Hi, Richie” Mom shouted over the blaring country music station. “Did you light Dad’s fancy grill and check that ugly black smoker in our back yard? He just sent me a text to remind you.” Mom cares much more about appearances than the great smoked barbeque Dad makes. She hates ribs because they have bones!

“Yeah, Mom. I’m going to my room to do summer reading.”

“Why, Richie, you still have a week left,” Mom said in her ‘teacher’ voice. She had been nagging me for weeks, but it is tough getting used to a new place. I’m not really sure about Bayview, football, the whole move.

I sat down in my lounge chair which I inherited from Grandpop. Even though Mom had used a special leather cleaner, it still smelled like Grandpop’s cigars. I was plodding through *Beowulf*, which was making no sense, and certainly was not my choice of reading material. Dad came home and announced “30 minutes until dinner.”

I took the welcome opportunity to get away from Beowulf and his dragons and bounced downstairs. “Dad, need any help?”

“Richie, will you put the corn on the grill while I get changed?” Dad learned the secret for grilling corn from Mom’s Uncle Tom at a family picnic. I carried the cooler outside and grabbed the soaking corn for the grill. Cooking with Dad was one of the few fun things we did together. Ever since we moved to Bayview, it’s been *work*. Unpacking. Cleaning. Learning a new place. Starting all over again.

Dad, spent every waking moment plotting to improve the Gazette and make it a successful newspaper.

In a few minutes, Dad was downstairs again, this time in his official cooking attire - including the apron embroidered with “Rob’s BBQ” I bought him for Father’s Day. Mom had gotten him a matching chef’s hat with a cartoon pig logo.

“Thanks for the help. Would you mind setting the table, Richie?”

“No problem.” I hate setting the table almost as much as cleaning up, but Dad gets so happy when I help him.

Dad went out to the smoker carrying a bottle of his homemade barbeque sauce. He also had a jar of the store brand sweet kind that mom likes better. In a few minutes he returned, smiling, and carrying in barbequed ribs. “Richie, could you grab the door?” Dad then got the grilled corn and veggies in successive trips. Finally he brought in the boneless chicken breast for Mom. The table was filled with “enough food for 10 people” as Mom would say.

“Dad, this is the best grill I have ever seen.”

“Finally, I have a real smoker just like the BBQ restaurants.”

Mom was still in the laundry room as I followed Dad into the kitchen, closed the door to the deck, and plopped down at the kitchen table, ready to dig in.

“Lil, dinner!”

As Dad was sitting and pouring unsweetened iced tea, he ever-so-casually asked “Well, how was your first day of football for the Bayview Tigers?” Even though he tried to be offhand, he will always be a lawyer. If I don’t give him a sentence

or two, he will end up cross-examining me for 15 minutes.

“Great. We started doing drills with the upperclassmen and Coach went over the signals for the Team,” I hoped that would keep Dad happy.

Then Mom came out of the laundry room drying her hands and commenting “I just don’t like the idea of Richie playing such a rough sport. Studies have shown that football players suffer many undiagnosed concussions.”

My mouth opened to speak, but Dad saved me by saying “Oh Lil, it will be a great way for him to meet boys and fit into his new school. He needs it, socially.”

Dad knew how to get right to Mom. After all, moving here this summer has been a pain. I just can’t believe Dad convinced her to give up our home and her job so he could revive the ‘Bayview Gazette.’ Big deal. I wish I were back home starting at the Prep.

“Mom, I did meet a few guys, Alex and Jack.” She smiled and I knew we had her hooked. “Back in Middle School, the bowling team was great for free bowling but there never was much of a crowd. There was no marching band and certainly no cheerleaders and free Gatorade.”

“I am so glad you like Bayview” Mom continued. “I was worried that you would miss your friends.”

“I am making new friends in Karate, and after football season there is wrestling and baseball.”

“That’s right, Lil, he still has karate and other activities.”

“Wrestling? We never talked about wrestling. Football is bad enough...”

“Now Lil, we’ll see what happens. At least Richie is making friends.”

“Mom, even though I always enjoyed visiting Grandpop in this house, I do miss my old friends and home.”

“Richie, this *is* ‘home’” Dad emphasized. “It certainly is different for me running the Gazette. I liked teaching law, but this is an exciting challenge. After all, the newspaper is a family legacy. You can help me at the Gazette. You’ll be the 4<sup>th</sup> generation at the Paper.”

This was a good lead to change the topic. “Dad, what are you working on at the Gazette?” I asked.

Dad started talking about the series he was writing on Bayview’s high taxes. “I just can’t figure it out. Bayview is 80% business properties, yet we have the highest taxes in Bay County.” Somehow, Dad always found a way to talk about tax law and government. Any second now, he will start complaining that ‘none of the politicians ever talk about real reform and tax simplification.’

As I was finishing my second rack of ribs, the doorbell rang.

I ran to the door. It was Alex.

“Hi, Chet, I thought we could hang out.”

Dad came to the door and I introduced Alex, who took one long whiff and declared “Something sure smells good in here.”

“Alex, why don’t you join us for dinner?” Dad offered. He always liked having someone new enjoy his food. He put a rack of ribs, corn, and homemade coleslaw on a plate for Alex, then stealthily started the interrogation.

“So,” he began, “Alex, are you on the football team with Richie’?”

Gulping down a big chunk of meat, Alex said “Yeah, and Chet seems to be a real favorite of the coach.”

Mom said “why are you calling him ‘Chet?’ We have always called him ‘Richie’ because he is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Richard Chester Franklin.”

Here they go again, talking about my name. Now I have to go through a big explanation. What a mess.

I tried to shortcut the whole process by saying “Mom, the coach just finds it easier to call me ‘Chet’ so the whole team now uses that nickname.”

Before I got any further, Dad was at it again. “So Alex, have you lived around here long?”

Alex was chewing on the bone and garbled out that he had lived here his whole life, but only recently moved into the Bayview Farms development. “I like living in my new house but there aren’t many high school kids around. It’s great that Chet lives so close. We can practice some of our football plays together.”

Of course that answer was not good enough for Dad. As Alex was chewing his corn on the cob, Dad did some further ‘grilling.’ Alex said his last name was Davis and that his family had lived in Bayview for several generations.

“You know, Alex” Dad explained, “Bayview Farms was originally the Franklin farm started by my Great-grandfather. I used to spend summers here as a boy.”

I couldn’t take it anymore so I nudged Alex. “Let’s go out for a catch.” He took one last bite of corn, grabbed a corn muffin, mumbled his ‘Thank-yous’, and we went out.

As we were tossing the football, Alex asked “Chet, why did you move to Bayview?”

“This Spring my Grandpop died.”

“Was he sick?”

“He was in great shape and worked at the paper every day. Suddenly, he went to the hospital and died within a few days. That’s when Dad got the idea to move up here since he inherited the house.”

“Well I’m sure glad you moved here. Most of the houses are filled with little kids.”

“Alex, go out deep!” I yelled as I threw a bomb. Suddenly, there was a loud



screech. Alex fell and our black cat, Gregory, raced away.

“What was that?” Alex demanded.

“Oh, that’s just Gregory. He thinks he is the great hunter cat now that he can run outside.”

“He certainly hunted me.” Alex said. “You know, Chet, there are Great Horned Owls around here.”

“What are they?”

“They are giant owls that hunt small mammals including cats. That’s why Woolsie is an indoor cat.”

“Ever since we moved here, Gregory was constantly running outside. We gave up and installed the cat door.”

“Well, you really should consider keeping him inside.”

After a few more plays, it started getting too dark. Alex went home and I tried to sneak in the house to avoid the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree.

Dad was waiting in the kitchen.

“Richie, or should I say ‘Chet’ don’t you think it’s time for bed? You have practice early tomorrow morning. I’ll drive you and your friend to school on the way to the Paper.”

Dad was right, but I would never let him know it. Every muscle in my body ached and I couldn’t wait to hit the hay. Thank heavens my room has its own bathroom (it was Grandpop’s study) so I can take a shower, get into my pajamas and just hop into bed. I was on the last few chapters of the Hardy Boys *The Secret of the Soldier’s Gold*. Just as I was drifting off to sleep, I was startled by a loud “bang, clang, bang.”

