

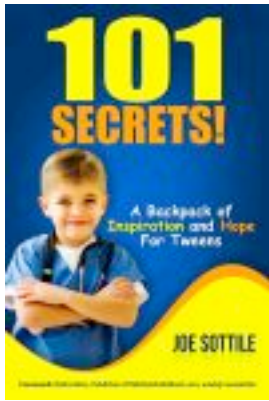
# 101 SECRETS!



A Backpack of  
**Inspiration** and **Hope**  
For Tweens

**JOE SOTTILE**

Foreword: *Debra Ross, Publisher of KidsOutAndAbout.com, weekly newsletter*



*This book is Joe's legacy to his five grandchildren. It's a way of giving back some "smarts" he learned. Joe asked Debra Ross, who's a popular homeschooler, writer, editor and creator of the KOA weekly newsletter, to write a Foreword. Debra's "Foreword" explains clearly why the book is useful to readers.*

# 101 SECRETS!

## A BACKPACK OF INSPIRATION AND HOPE FOR TWEENS

by Joe Sottile

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### Thanks to Jon Phillips

My deep gratitude goes to Jon Phillips who is the founder of Open Clip Art Library, which was launched in 2004. This library contains thousands of digital images whose copyright has been waived and is now in Public Domain, and can be used for any purpose. This is a wonderful library in scope and organization. All graphics in this book were acquired from the Open Clip Art Library. I am so grateful to be allowed permission to use them on these pages. Please take the time to visit <http://www.openclipart.org/browse> to gather your own special graphics for your use.

### Thanks to Zig Ziglar and Others

I want to thank the many writers and thinkers for the quotes that are in this book, especially Zig Ziglar, a famous speaker and author, for the “cream of the crop” quotation that I have used. Explore Zig Ziglar writings and you will discover his keen interest in quotes.



## **Dedication**

To **Marilyn**, my wife,  
who has hundreds of secrets  
for a great marriage and for giving  
our children, Mary Lou and April,  
*roots and wings.*

**And, of course, to my awesome grandkids:**

**Ricky J., Ryan, David, Megan, and Matt**



*“There’s nothing in a caterpillar that tells you it’s going to be a butterfly.”*

~Richard Buckminster Fuller,  
US engineer and architect, 1895-1983

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## Acknowledgements

*“Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend.”~Melody Beattie*

When you create a book, there are many people who help you along the way. The first person that leaps to mind is my wife, **Marilyn Sottile**. She always has significant thoughts to share on whatever I write. And she readily forgives me on those days that I turn into a hermit in my den and spend hours pounding at my keyboard, forgetting to eat. Marilyn is my number one fan. Thanks, sweetheart, for being there for me, especially near the end of this long process. You bring out the best in all the people you meet.

**Debra Ross** is the founder and creator of **KidsOutandAbout.com**. She spreads the word in the Rochester area and beyond about activities that you can do with your family. She is constantly expanding her sphere of positive influence with her calendar of events, places to go, lists of camps, classes to attend, and where to enjoy a piece of culture. She is also expanding the number of cities where she has sites. I met her at a writing group, and we became instant friends. She has been an editor, publisher, and a muse to me. Debra graciously agreed to write the Foreword, and identify what makes this book especially useful to kids, but she has done much more than that.

I met **Ivy W. Hofmann** a number of years ago at a writing workshop, and we became good friends. Ever since 1999, she has been the **CEO of Ivy Hofmann & Associates**, involved in executive and management coaching. We both enjoy each other’s writing style and sense of humor. Ivy was instrumental in turning this book from a mere flip book of *101 Secrets* into a book with more substance. In the beginning, my secrets sounded like things I merely believed in, not secrets that would make a difference in the lives of kids. She encouraged the best in me. Thank you, Ivy.

I met **Jacquie McTaggart** through e-mail. She is a sought after public speaker and author of *From the Teacher’s Desk*, and *If They Don’t Learn the Way You Teach, Teach the Way They Learn*. Both books are insightful books for teachers, parents, and administrators. We share the same online publisher, **Booklocker.com**. So we started sharing ideas and essays. Jacquie

read **101 Secrets!** two times, and she made many constructive suggestions. Near the “publishing finish line” Jacquie was a godsend in proofreading the final copy. Thank you, Jacquie.

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I also want to thank all the **boys and girls** that I ever taught. They deserve a round of applause, but not because they put up with my corny sense of humor. They deserve accolades because they made a difference in my life in *countless ways*. I will treasure the memories. *Thank you all.*

## Foreword

I hated being a pre-teenager.

At the time, I thought I hated it because I was shy, and awkward, and had no idea how to interact with other kids or adults. I thought I hated it because school was hard, and people were mean. I felt that I had no special skills, and I fit in exactly nowhere.

Nowadays, I have come to realize the truth: I hated those years because I had no good map for navigating the world. **WAIT...THERE'S A MAP, you ask?** Believe it or not, yes, there is. Actually, it's not one map, but a lot of possible maps. In this book, you will find that Joe Sottile provides two kinds of navigational tools:

- a) Things that you can do to make life good (or better) **RIGHT NOW**.
- b) Principles for seeing and thinking clearly about situations you may encounter in the future.

**Think of the first part as being given a nice clear map, with 101 SIGNPOSTS highlighting the roads that are useful to take immediately.** Joe's secrets are strategies that anyone can learn, and his stories help you see that others have been there before. Follow some of these guidelines and, I promise, your life will improve in small or large ways. You want to know, **RIGHT NOW**, how to be a better friend, how to learn what you need to learn to be successful at school and in your career someday, how to avoid bullies, how to be happier?

**Read this book, find what is useful to you, and practice it!** I guarantee that you'll find the 'tween years a whole lot easier, which will make the teen years a whole lot easier, which will make adulthood a whole lot easier.

**Think of the second part as being given a compass.** When you were a small kid, adults made all of your decisions **FOR** you. But as you grow, you learn to take charge of your own decisions, so that you become your

own guide to the right ways to behave. As you read this book, you're going to encounter a lot of big ideas, and a lot of small actions that are going to get you thinking and trying them out right away. The time just before the teens is a confusing time, one in which a young person is constantly confronted with new ideas, opportunities, and pressures: all kinds of times when it's possible to go wrong. People who don't learn to make good decisions at this time in life can find themselves getting into habits of acting without thinking. Joe shows you how to think about your world, so you can focus on what it means to choose the right path for yourself and gain some skill in doing that.

As you start, though, **the most important thing to understand is this:** All through your life, people are going to be urging you to “do the right thing.” However, they act as though you already know not only WHAT the right thing is to do, but WHY. Why do the right thing? Many people try to “do the right thing” so as not to get into trouble with the authorities. Or because they think it will get them some reward down the road. Or because they think it's what God wants them to do.

**But there's a better reason.** This book is special—Joe Sottile is special—because he knows something that a lot of people, even adults, don't. And *this* is the main secret that is really behind this book:

The best reason to “do the right thing” is that IT WILL BENEFIT YOU: the you that is you now, and the you that is you as an adult. People who never figure out how to do the right thing are not—cannot be—happy. But if you get into a habit of consistently thinking things through, figuring out what solution will most move the world in a positive direction, what solution is creative rather than destructive... then you'll have a happy life. I promise.

Right now, you may not have a vision of what a good life will be. After all, some people might have told you that NOW is the best time of your life. THAT IS NONSENSE. It's only true for those who make no effort as kids to learn what they need to learn. But if you start now with Joe's map, and

use it as a guide to draw your own, you will have much of what you need to lead a productive and happy life.

As I was reading this book, I recognized that Joe tells many truths that I had to learn the hard way because I had no good guide as I was growing up. Do yourself a favor: Make it easy. Read this book and try some of the ideas.

It may be that you have parents who can give you good guidance as you move through these years of figuring out who you are and where you want to go. **If that is the case, I encourage you to read the book together with them**, as I am doing with my own daughters (who are 10 and 12). It makes for some great dinner-table discussions.

It may be that you have parents who are not good about giving you advice, even though they may be supportive. **If that is the case, I still encourage you to read the book together with them**. It can help them remember what it was like to be a kid, and it can help them work through some of these ideas themselves so they can better help you.

It may be that you have parents who are clueless and aren't really interested in these ideas, who don't understand that it's their job to help you learn how to navigate through the world, who maybe have never learned these lessons themselves. **If that is the case, it is especially important that you read this book** because you will have to do a lot of raising of yourself, and this book will really help. Please accept my sympathies. I had parents like that. It took a lot of work and thinking, but I overcame it. You can too.

***Debra Ross***

***Publisher, KidsOutAndAbout.com***

***January, 2012***

## Introduction

The secrets in *101 Secrets!* may not all be new to you, but many of them were to me, while growing up. If no one ever tells you these ideas here, then they remain *secrets* you have to learn the *hard way*—through trial and error. I guess learning them the hard way is okay.

*But I wish that when I was about your age, someone told me these nuggets of truth, a little at a time.* Perhaps, I could have sat next to my father or grandfather on the couch, and he could have shared these secrets of growing up. In a perfect world that might have happened.

I'm writing this book for you, pretending you are in my classroom or sitting on my long couch. This isn't really a stretch for me because for thirty-three years I did share many insights, stories, and poems with my students. **And my grandchildren sit right next to me when we read together.**

*I didn't start to feel like an important person in my own life until I graduated college, got married, and started teaching. You don't have to wait twenty-four years to feel special.* Now, I am old enough to be your grandfather. Matter of fact, I am a grandfather with *five wonderful grandchildren*. This book is written for you and them. It gives me a chance to share 101 secrets or ideas that I believe in. It gives you a chance to use these "*tools*" to improve the quality of your life, and be happier.

*If you decide to read this book on your own, just think of me as a kind grandfather.* I am going to fill up *your mind (or backpack)* with wonderful *secrets (words of wisdom)* that will be like *tools* that you can use on *your journey through life*.

Some things I say will make *perfect sense* and *be perfectly clear*. You will say to yourself, "*I understand that! I've been in that situation before!*" *And I hope that feels good. Other times, things I have written may not make sense right away. Discuss these with a friend or a trusted adult, then move on to the ones that you do understand.*

*For the sake of clarity, there's something else that I want to make perfectly clear.* I tried to make the print *a little extra interesting* by using regular print, **boldface print**, *italics*, and a *combination of the last two*. I wanted to “shake up” your reading experience. That’s the teacher in me hoping that you don’t nod off. Lots of words strung together can get rather boring. So, I did something else. I’ve included some funny stuff and poems along the way. That’s the poet and humorist in me.

*One thing readers will soon discover, especially in my poetry, is that I'm on the side of kids.* This ancient body of mine is just a disguise. I have a kid’s heart inside of me, and the “**biggest thought in this book**” follows.

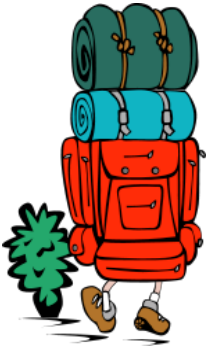
*Kids, you are not alone in your feelings and experiences. Many of your friends and the kids at school have had the same feelings and experiences.* I do not expect you to understand everything in the book right away. I am learning new things myself each day. *I just hope that you will find some ideas here that you can use at school tomorrow or in conjunction with your home-schooling.* I am sure, if you read this book and discuss it with mom or dad, life as a kid will still be challenging, *but not as tough* as it might have been. *The book will enable you to grow smarter, mature, and survive your preteen and teen years with flair. Each secret presents its own special challenge.*

Now you have a set of **101 Secrets or Tools**. You can learn them—that is, *internalize them*, and carry them in your head wherever you go. *If you “grasp” firmly to this backpack of coaching tools, you will enjoy life more fully as it unfolds.*

*Helen Keller said, “What we have once enjoyed we can never lose...all that we love deeply becomes part of us.”*

*I hope you enjoy this book.*





# ***CHAPTER ONE***

**WISH**



**I HAD  
KNOWN  
THESE THINGS  
SOONER**

1. **Being a kid is tough.** *Does that sound like a secret? How often do the people around you let you know that it's a special challenge growing up in the changing times that we live in? I know it's a big challenge. I was a kid once. And, if I chose to tell you exactly how many years ago, you would probably say, "That was light years ago. Did dinosaurs roam the earth?"*

*Well, no, but when I was born, people didn't even own a black-and-white TVs. You can stop laughing. Don't fall out of your beanbag chair. I know that it can be tough when you don't get the encouragement that you think you need...I want you to know that it can be challenging to do the right thing when you're angry or upset...At times, life just doesn't seem fair...Feelings can be confusing, choices can be difficult...Friends can be mean...Social media can be a blessing or a curse...I just want you to know that I survived, and you can, too...And in the words of Louise Hay, inspirational author, "I find that when we really love and accept and approve of ourselves exactly as we are, then everything in life works."*

2. **There are two ways people can inspire you.** *My father was a very hard-working man. Thanks to his actions, he inspired me to be a hard worker. I can't tell you how many weekends I helped my father in the back yard preparing bundles of copper pipe for his plumbing business. Many weeks he worked seven days in a row.*

*Dad's actions as a worker spoke loud and clear to me, "You should work hard for the things you want in life." I grew up willing to work diligently to achieve whatever I needed to achieve—from making the All Star Baseball Team (ages 13-15) to graduating from college. Thank you, Dad.*

3. **Older people have something wonderful to offer you: wisdom.** And *wisdom* is just a fancy word for “*smarts*.” If you decide to hang around older people like your grandparents, aunts, uncles, teachers, or parents, *some of that “smarts” is going to rub off on you*, and you’re going to be able to do more than you ever dreamed.

*If you hang out with me and read this whole book, I think that when you’re done, you will have some new ideas for living a more rewarding and exciting life.*

*Zig Ziglar, a famous speaker and author, once said, “Great quotes make the light bulb go off in my mind. If you’re like me, you’ll jump at the chance to bypass all the churning and scoop the cream right off the top—that’s what quotes are...the cream of learning.”*

*That’s Zig sharing his wisdom. This is Helen Keller sharing her wisdom, “Life is a succession of lessons which must be lived to be understood.”*

*That means we’re learning all of the time in school and out of school. And life seems to make more sense to us, when we’ve had more time to piece it together. That’s not to say you can’t pick up some tips or secrets along the way! And that’s the purpose of this book—to give you some tips on making the best choices possible in life. If you keep your eyes and ears wide open, you don’t have to learn everything the hard way.*

4. **Not all parents are good at encouraging their children with their words.** When I was 15, I told my father, “*I think that I have a shot at making the All-Stars this year.*”

*He said, "I'll eat my hat if you do."*

Dad wasn't trying to be mean. That was his way of saying, *"I want you to double your effort to prove me wrong."*

*Did I understand that at the time? No way!* I thought he didn't believe in my talents. So what do you do if your dad is like mine? You could try talking to him about your feelings. If that doesn't work, you can briefly tune him out and focus on those people who have more confidence in you.

*Be sure to remind yourself again and again of the positive things people have said about you. That's what I did, and it helped. And don't forget to give Dad lots of chances to understand where you are coming from, and what you believe in.*

*Fortunately for me, Mom inspired me with her words and actions. My mother always believed that I could do anything I set my mind on doing.*

When I was in college and worried about how I would do at student teaching, I said, *"Mom, I am student teaching in a college campus elementary school. They have these two-way glass mirrors where college professors and college students can come observe you anytime, and you don't even know they are there, sitting and watching you teach. It's like being in a gigantic fish bowl."*

**I will never forget what she said to me.**

*"Joe, you will be a Kingfish in that fish bowl."*

*And I was—partly because my mother believed in me. Luckily, I had other adults (aunts, uncles, and grandparents) who believed in me. They also inspired me to do well in college. Look for the best in people, pick those traits out, and let them guide you from a distance. That is, pay special attention to their unique characteristics and follow in their footsteps. The best kind of people to be around are those that have confidence in you.*

5. **We are all gifted human beings, smart and talented in many ways.**

*We are all gifts to the universe. We all have special talents that will delight others. There are nine types of intelligences. That means there are nine very different ways of being smart and talented.*

*Kids can be smart at using words, math, or music. Some kids are great at remembering what they see or at doing anything that requires physical movement. Some kids are good at understanding the feelings of others and these kids are very social. Some kids are really in touch with their own feelings and the feelings of others. These kids love being around people. There are kids that love the outdoors and are “tuned” into nature. The point is: There’s more than one way to be smart. That’s worth repeating.*

*You can be extra smart and talented in more than two or three ways. For a long time, teachers and great thinkers thought that you could only be smart with words, numbers, and certain types of thinking. If you weren’t smart in these areas, you were in big trouble. This is what schools usually test on: what students know about words, numbers, and thinking skills. But now the brain has been studied in great depth and we know much more about how it works. As hinted earlier, we know there are at least nine*

*different ways of being smart. If we develop the areas that we're naturally strong at, they become our talents. If we use our talents for doing good things, and those talents will most likely lead to a happy life.*

*You have talents that you need to discover and develop. If we bury our talents, we will never become the person we secretly dream of becoming. If we think we're better than everyone else, we're fools. We're all especially strong at some of these nine intelligences.*

*None of us are strong at all of them, but all of us have talents or "gifts" that can improve the world. "Your talent is God's gift to you. What you do with it is your gift back to God."~Anonymous*

6. It's not your bad feelings—anger, hate, and jealousy—that counts. It's what you do with your feelings that counts. *When you're angry, you may feel a surge of rage and hate in your heart for a teacher, parent, brother, sister or friend. You may want to hurt that person. But you know that's not the right thing to do. What should you do? Count to 100...Take deep breaths...Listen to your favorite music...Play a video game...If you are inside the house, go play outside...Bounce a ball...In one or two hours, you might wonder what the fuss was all about. If not, talk to an adult about your angry feelings. This is very important to do. It's a wise choice to make in the long run.*

*On a sunny day at school I would sometimes let my class have a few extra minutes of recess after lunch. Occasionally my students got into trouble on the playground.*

*One afternoon Billy and Jake got into a wrestling match on the back end of the playground. When we came back into the classroom, I think some students hoped that I would start yelling at Billy and Jake because they had broken the rules. (All real names are changed to protect the guilty.)*

*Billy and Jake were filled with anger. They had purposely knocked each other to ground and they sprung up like wild dandelions waving in the wind looking for a fight. They had grass stains on their shorts and the veins were bulging in their necks. Both were ready to duke it out. All they needed were boxing gloves and a ref's whistle blaring, and then it would be a brawl. As we got back to the classroom, the whole class was watching me, so I moved Billy and Jake to the far corners of the room.*

*Then I gave each one a piece of paper with three sentences on it:*

- 1) Tell me everything that happened outside.*
- 2) Tell me exactly what you did wrong.*
- 3) Tell me why this event or problem is never going to happen again.*

*Billy and Jake slumped down at their desks and started writing. They answered each question in paragraph form. I didn't accept short answers.*

As for the rest of the class, they sat there wondering why I didn't yell and scream at the rule breakers. *On the playground, Billy and Jake had let their angry feelings boil over. Why humiliate them in front of the class? Moreover, Billy and Jake learned a wonderful lesson by writing about the incident. Guess what it was.*

*“You’re right! One way to deal with anger is to write about it.” When they were done writing, the anger drained from their system. Each one realized they were part of the problem. They admitted that they were sorry for their inappropriate playground behavior.*

*Once they wrote about what they did wrong, it was easier for them to talk about it with me, and each other.*

*Sometimes, when I did things like this with kids in trouble, the two kids would even shake hands and say they were sorry. But they always had a chance first to write and talk about their angry feelings. That’s what you need to do when you’re upset and angry. Get it out with words and pictures, not fists. You don’t always have to show what you’ve written to others. It can be private, but get the anger on paper, and you’ll feel better. Martin Luther King said, “Nothing good ever comes out of violence.”*

*That’s why mankind has had so many wars. Countries never seem to forgive one another for the violence done to them. Just like people sometimes keep grudges, countries sometime do too. What are countries made of?—land, borders, and people.*

**7. The limits your parents “set” are really to protect you, even if it doesn’t seem that way to you.** *When I was 5, something terrible happened to me that changed my life forever, and it changed it for the better in one important way. The day started like any other day. I got up for school, gulped down my bowl of Kellogg’s, “Breakfast of Champions,” and marched off to kindergarten. My school day was totally uneventful.*



*Just before dinner time the smell of burning leaves filled the October air. A large crowd of kids and adults gathered across the far end of the street to watch the fall of a local landmark. A gigantic tree was being taken down right in my own neighborhood.*

*This was no easy task. Many spectators were crowded around the tree, young and old. From the cement steps of my house, I witnessed this unusual event. The bare tree, bound with heavy ropes and chains, was lowered to the sidewalk. The once majestic tree, now barren, safely fell to the ground with a muffled “Thud!” But the kids and grownups did not leave. They moved in closer to linger around this fallen remnant of better days, as if it were a giant redwood that had been expelled from its haven without a fair trial, and then executed.*

*I needed to run my hands on the tree’s bumpy bark and say good-bye to this remarkable tree, but I wasn’t allowed off my side of the city block. I thought: “Do parents always know what’s right to do? Some rules stop me from having fun. What’s the worst thing that could happen?”*

*I dashed across the street to say farewell to the fallen tree. Friends and neighbors were there too. I don’t really remember my exact thoughts, but after what seemed like a long time of mingling with the other spectators, a sinking feeling grew and grew in my stomach. I started getting nervous about my visit to the fallen tree, and how long I was there. Suddenly I realized that I had overstayed my visit. My name was being shouted in the distance. My mind was flooded with two thoughts: I am late for dinner, and I am in big trouble.*

*I darted out between two parked cars and raced toward my side of the street, and I was struck down by a car. One of my sneakers flew into the gutter. The old car that hit me passed over my body. I was covered with grease, bruises, and some blood—my throat was too dry to let me cry.*

*I was definitely in a state of shock and wonder at what really just happened to me. All of a sudden, out of a group of neighbors and strangers my father appeared. Face ash red and sweating, he leaned over and said, “Joe, I love you son—the ambulance is on its way.”*

Then I softly asked, “*Dad, am I going to die? Am I? Am I?*” Drifting into unconsciousness I heard no answer.

*Of course, I didn’t die, nor was I seriously injured. By all the laws of nature and chance, I should have been injured or killed. While the two-ton car drove over my body, the wheels never touched me—a miracle! And I know that’s difficult to believe, but it’s true. When I was a kid, cars were built high off the ground—lucky for me! But not all kids will be so lucky, when they break rules. I knew that I wasn’t supposed to cross the street by myself. I had broken an important rule and almost died.*

*Respect the rules your parents set concerning safety. You need a chance to grow up and make a difference in the world. Don’t depend on any miracles, if you take dangerous risks.*

**8. Social Media can be a curse or a blessing. It’s your choice. Social media is whatever you and your parents make it. That is a strong**

*statement. What does it mean? Some studies show that kids have become more narcissistic (selfish). These studies indicate that preteens and teens that have a strong presence on Facebook possibly show more signs of anxiety, depression, and psychological problems. Facebook time can impact on how much kids study and complete homework assignments.*

*Okay, we live in the “Age of Technology.” Our cell phones can keep our family members in better contact. We can instantly communicate with others, including texting and sending photos. We can have photo albums on Facebook, and share them. We can e-mail friends and relatives across the country through the Internet. Texting and iPods make the world a more fun place. Is there a downside to this?*

*There certainly is. The new technology is good as long as parents monitor what’s being shared from place to place. That’s the good news. But you shouldn’t write or send any photos that you wouldn’t want Mom or Dad to see. Your parents are legally and morally responsible for you until the age of twenty-one. You don’t want to make life more difficult for them.*

*Good parents make the tough decisions. They don’t always say yes to what you want because everyone else is doing it or allowing it. Everybody else can be wrong or acting like cowards. The popular thing to say or do can be wrong or risky. When you’re mature enough to handle social media, your parents will let you know. That’s an important part of their role as parent. Don’t get annoyed if your parents insist on being your “friend” on Facebook. They have a perfect right to know what you’re sharing. It’s okay if you don’t like that choice, just remember that they have your best*

*interests at heart. We have all seen on TV or read in the newspapers stories about kids who have been abducted or worse because of a connection that was made through the Internet. Sometimes bad choices can lead to “really bad choices.” That’s why your parents need to have an eye on the screen too. And sometimes kids think that nothing bad can ever happen to them. That’s not true. We all need to be aware of the dangers of social media, and make wise choices.*

**9. You matter, even if it seems nobody else seems to think so.** *I can’t see into your mind or your heart. I don’t know what you think of yourself most of the time. Do you feel that you are talented? Important? Unique? What does “unique” mean? It means that you are unequaled—no one is just like you. You are so special that you are beyond special. If you don’t feel that way, maybe this book will help you see the magic in being fully alive.*

**10. When your parents discipline you, they still love you.** *A matter of fact, your parents always love you. Then why do they sometimes make rules that seem “stupid” to you? They make rules because they love you. Rules are made for many reasons—safety, order, comfort, cleanliness, to conserve energy, and so on. Rules work best when they have consequences to breaking them. That’s why your parents probably sent you as toddler to a time-out area or took your toys away briefly, when you broke a rule. But always remember that when you disobey a rule, your parents still like and love you. They just don’t like your rule breaking behavior.*

*It’s important to remember that no matter what you do, your parents will always love you. I am assuming that they are relatively “normal” people.*

*Kids, especially teens, don't necessarily consider their parents "normal," while they are going through their teens. How can you tell if your parents are "really" normal? That's a good question, a very good one.*

*In your heart, you should feel that they have your best interests are a high priority to them, even if you don't agree with them all of the time. Perhaps you feel they are too wrapped up in their own lives with their own issues and problems to have your best interests at heart. No matter what, there two things I can say with confidence:*

- 1. They shouldn't hurt you physically.*
- 2. You need other trusted adults in your life such as aunts, uncles, grandparents, family, friends, guidance counselor, and clergy members. You shouldn't deal with life's challenges with only your parents to trust in. Call on others when life seems overwhelming.*

*A little humor break: I recently discovered that the breakfast treat "Hot Pockets" has a sense of humor. Written on two wrappers I found this:*

*"Hot breakfast eaters are less likely to wear sweater vests." (Based on research done by a space chimp.)*

*"In blind taste test, hungry people chose a hot breakfast over cold cereal 90% of the time." (According to totally made-up survey results.)*

**CATCH HUMOR WHEREVER YOU CAN AND “SECRETS” TOO!**  
*This book isn’t about poetry, but it’s “Super Bowl Sunday” as I write this, and I thought I’d share this poem from PICTURE POETRY ON PARADE! (page 81). I think that your parents might like it too. Life’s secrets are sometimes “hidden” in poetry. See if you can discover any “secrets.”*

### **SPORTS HEROES**

*Sports heroes are like clouds,  
they come and go.*

*Sports heroes are like feelings,  
they come and go.*

*Sports heroes get trophies and glory  
and a bundle of money  
for doing what they love doing.*

*My parents aren’t sports heroes  
but they go to and fro work every day,  
while hardly ever complaining.*

*My parents don’t love their jobs,  
but they do them every day for me,  
while hardly ever griping.*

*My parents deserve trophies and glory  
for what they do for me.  
They are the real heroes.*

*(One secret that you may have discovered is that in your life your parent is a true hero, and, of course, a parent’s love is priceless.)*

# ***CHAPTER TWO***



***CATCH***

***THE***

***RIGHT***

***ATTITUDE!***

**11. Changes can be good or bad, or both.** Let's say you move to a bigger house. *That's good.* But you had to leave some neighborhood friends behind. *That's bad.* But now you have room in the back yard for a dog. *That's good.* But you have to clean up after the dog. Well, you get the idea. *Some changes turn out much better than you expect, especially if you strive to have a positive attitude about the change.*

*How can you have a positive attitude about change?* If the family is moving, you can list the positive changes. *Maybe* you're moving into a new and bigger house. *Maybe* you'll get your own bedroom. *Maybe* the neighborhood is nicer. *Perhaps* you'll be closer to parks, playgrounds, or a Youth Center.

**Whatever reasons make the change look possibly good, go with those changes. Build them up in your mind. Talk to others about them. Look forward to them.** When you talk to yourself in your head about things, it's called *self-talk*.

*There's nothing wrong with self-talk. You are not trying to trick yourself into liking the prospect of moving away from your friends and school. You are just trying to put a positive spin on moving.*

*The more you think positively about what you are going to have to do anyway, the more likely you will find out more positives about the situation. At some point you might even wonder what the big deal was about in terms of moving. The important thing is to search for as many positives as you can find.*



*The more positives you find, the easier it will be for you to accept the change and see some good in your parent's decision. Just say the change in your mind or aloud to yourself in a positive manner until you make it real...In other words, the key to success is: "Say-it to Make-it!"*

12. **Attitude is everything!** *I am not talking about having an "attitude" that you're "cool" or popular or the world's best athlete. The attitude that I am talking about is what you believe in your heart is true. "Attitude" is made up of your values, beliefs, and feelings. If you sincerely believe that you can become boxing champion of the world, then it might be possible. We have to work hard to make our goals come true.*

**Muhammad Ali**, former Heavyweight Champion of the World said, *"Champions aren't made in the gyms. Champions are made from something they have deep inside them—a desire, a dream, a vision."* First comes the dream, then comes the work to make the dream come true—a day at a time. *We become what we dream*, and our success begins with the **right attitude**.

*With the right attitude, you can accomplish many things.* If you consider yourself a **smart person**, you will probably do **smart things** such as *ask questions in class, study for tests, and complete homework assignments.* And you will earn good grades. If you think you're an athlete, you will practice the sports that interest you and listen to your coaches so that you can improve your skills. *You will practice, practice, and practice some more.* You can make the school soccer team or whatever it is that you want to accomplish. If your goal is to have a number of friends, you will be

friendly and helpful to others. You will go out of your way to praise others instead of finding fault. You will invite kids over to your house for birthday parties and sleepovers. You will engage in after school clubs and activities. ***Eventually, you will most likely be a rather popular kid.*** With the ***right attitude***, good things happen sooner or later.

***I am not saying it's easy to keep a positive attitude. You will be challenged to think and stay positive all of your life.*** For example, some kids and adults are constantly grumpy. They are not happy with their lives or themselves, and they show it wherever they are. This doesn't do them any good, but they do it anyway. (Perhaps they do it for ***attention.***) ***Don't let these people steal your bright, cheerful positive attitude about life.*** Don't let them take it away.

***You have the right to be happy and positive. So make your positive attitude out of steel—strong and unbreakable.*** Yes, develop a ***steel positive attitude***, and nobody will ever be able to “steal” happiness from you. ***When people grump at you, give back a big smile or a big “Hello!” I know it sounds crazy, but it will drive them crazy too. You gave back what they never expected—“friendliness.”***

**13. You have a choice to be happy or unhappy.** ***You can make up your mind to be happy.*** Some kids and many adults probably aren't going to believe this one. Maybe they're sad most of the time, and this secret sounds ***like a whopper—“a big lie.”*** Well, chances are, if you share your problems with Mom or Dad, you will be happy most of the time. Don't say to yourself, ***“Oh, they will never understand.”*** Before you say that to yourself,

*give them a chance to understand. President Abraham Lincoln once said, “A man is as happy as he makes his mind to be.” (By “man” he really meant men and women, boys and girls.) Furthermore, if you develop an attitude of appreciation, you double your chances of being happy. To remind yourself to be more thankful, just say these six magical words to yourself: “I need an attitude of gratitude!” It is certainly one of the major secrets on the road to happiness.*

**14. Kids who are excited about things in their lives are happier than those who are not.** This secret seems somewhat obvious to me. So why share it? Well, I’ve been around the block a few more times than you. That’s just a picturesque (pretty) way of saying that I’m older. People, whether young or old, love being around other people who are *passionate about things* such as *music, sports, movies, video games, texting, sharing, helping, pleasing*, and so on. Of course, I am talking about people who love *wholesome things that are good for the mind and body.*

*Love something wholesome! I am talking about having hobbies and special interests. Join clubs at school. Sign up for the sport of your choice. Put yourself out on the playing field. Try your best. You only fail when you stop trying. Kids excited about music, dance, pets, sports, books, nature, arts and crafts are fun kids to be around. All I have to do is walk down a few houses from my home and I will be at the “Hoyt Loving Zoo.”*

*That’s what I call my daughter’s house. She has three dogs, three cats, two frogs, guinea pigs, a bazillion tropical fish, and other interesting creatures. It’s a wonderful place to visit with no admission fees and soft drinks.*

***Oops! I forgot to mention the names of the caretakers of the zoo—Mary Lou and her three children: Ricky J., Ryan, and Megan. (And, yes, Dad too.)*** To put it mildly, all the members of the family love animals. Each animal is important in the lives of everyone in the household. They love them, care about them, talk to them, and take care of them. Their little “zoo” in their home makes their lives more interesting and fun. That’s what hobbies and special interests do for you as person. ***They add to the pleasure of meeting and knowing you like—whip cream, hot chocolate syrup and a cherry add to a sundae. It makes it extra delicious. Kids with the right attitude know that it’s up to them to make life interesting.***

What’s that you say? ***“How did I make my life interesting when I was your age?”*** Well, that’s a fair question. While growing up in the 50’s, baseball was truly the *national pastime*.

***For me, football and basketball weren’t even on my radar screen. My mind constantly focused on playing baseball in one form or another. And I shared this obsession with my cousin, John, who lived exactly one mile away. The prospects of playing ball always drew us together like mud to cleats.***

***John and I made up our own lineups, ground rules, and stadiums. At my house we played endless hours of stoop ball. We would fire the ball at the front brick steps, hoping to hit the point of the steps, and watch it soar across the street into the neighbor’s trees for a home run. Sometimes we would forget to take out the bug light over the porch and smash it to pieces on a foul ball.***

*After that we would race our bikes to John's stadium. At John's house we usually played wiffle ball, using a plastic ball and the house as a backstop. We were both equally talented, so it made for great games of wiffle ball.*

*Once John's mother, Aunt Frances, came outside to warn us not to play so close to the house. She said that we might break a window and pointed to a few cellar windows that we had broken with wayward softballs in the past.*

*John, using his best kid lawyer voice, stated his case clearly, "Mom, it's impossible to break a window with a plastic ball. Then he wound up and rifled the ball at the kitchen window." Two thoughts dashed through my mind: John is crazy and I better start running away as fast as I can.*

**"PONG!"**

*The ball bounced straight off the window without breaking it. I couldn't believe our good luck. John was smarter than I thought he was. And I was all fired up to hit a home run into the neighbor's yard. I imagined the ball sailing right over the redwood stained fence. I wanted to start the game off in a grand style with a leadoff homer. I couldn't wait to slash at that shiny white plastic ball.*

*While I envisioned the ball sailing homeward bound, I charged up to the invisible home plate. Already I could hear Mel Allen's voice shouting, "Going! Going! Gone!" Following John's first pitch with my bulging eyes, I slashed at the ball, and then to our astonishment the wooden broom handle bat sailed straight through the kitchen window in back of me!*

**“SMASH!” and “CRAAC!”**

*A split-second later, Aunt Frances stuck her head out of the shattered window and yelled, “You just did the impossible! You broke the window!”*

*Right after the kitchen window incident, we found an alternate stadium down the block—composed of a factory wall, a seldom used truck entrance, and some conveniently located black-top.*

*As soon as we outlined the strike zone with chalk on the cement wall, we played stickball one-on-one. The pitcher played infield, outfield, and called the pitch on the wall, if the batter did not swing. A homer was a direct hit on the factory across the street—a mighty blow with our sawed off broomstick—but it was possible, now and then. It was also possible to retrieve the ball from the factory roof, if we used several heavy duty pipes that connected the two buildings as a “ladder.” Climbing up that ladder never seemed risky because our priceless pink ball was waiting for us. We worked together like a Navy Seals team retrieving some precious cargo. After all, back then those balls cost us twenty-five cents.*

*You might wonder what we did when it rained out. We played ball on a game board called “All-Star Baseball.” The game had spinners, strategy, and cardboard disks. The disks represented famous players and their actual hitting statistics. *Babe Ruth had the biggest home run space and the biggest strike out space. (Hank Aaron hadn’t broken Ruth’s record yet.)* We had our own leagues, standings, and batting averages. Consequently, we knew exactly what to do on rainy days.*

*John and I never played regularly on the high school baseball team. But we did see major league games together at Yankee Stadium, the Polo Grounds, and Ebbets Field, thanks to paper route money we earned and a sense of adventure. The world was different back then. Parents didn't seem to mind if their kids went on long adventures without them. The times were safer or at least it seemed that way. And John and I were fairly sane kids back then. At least that's the way I like to remember it.*

*We gently argued a lot about who was the best professional baseball player—Mickey Mantle or Willie Mays. But we always loved the game and each other. We never cheated or cursed at one another. And we never argued about the score. The scoreboard was correctly written in our heads.*

*We taught our children to play softball and baseball. And now they are teaching their own children to play this wonderful game of hit and run, catch and throw. The joys of playing ball can be endless. My father taught me the basics of playing baseball, and he bought me my first baseball glove. If you were to ask me what are my favorite memories of my father, the answer would be simple.*

*It was the summer that he taught me to play baseball in the back yard. He bought a catcher's mitt for himself, and I fired the ball as hard as I could at his glove. This game of pitching and catching became a frequent ritual between the two of us. It also helped to bond us as father and son; I loved hearing the loud thud as the ball smashed into the mitt. It was music to my ears. Baseball is the kind of sport where you can invent your own stadiums, rules, and good times.*

*Baseball is the kind of sport where you can toss the ball from generation to generation. Baseball has made my life interesting and alive for over fifty years, thus bringing many moments of joy to me. As we live from moment to moment, it's important to remember the words of singer Bruce Springsteen: "It ain't no sin to be glad you're alive."*

*That seems like a good place to end this topic, but as our guide I need to talk about something rather important relatively early in the book. As a teacher and parent, I know that kids experience most adult-like emotions, and life is an emotional roller coaster ride with ups and downs. The lowest low is called "depression" and it's usually a solvable problem.*

*Sometimes troubled kids are so depressed that they think about ending their lives. Sometimes they try to do that, and that's no way to solve the problem. They have decided to apply a permanent solution to a temporary problem of feeling very sad. They have completely forgotten that feelings come and go, just like the sunshine and clouds do. One day it's sunny, the next it's cloudy. Weather and moods are both highly changeable. Death isn't. They need to reach out for help before they feel suicidal.*

*If the troubled kids only thought about what I've said thus far about their parents, their choices might be different: Your parents love you no matter what...you are smart and talented in more than one way...attitude is everything...make good choices...being a kid isn't easy...it's what you do with your feelings that counts...you are loved more than you will ever fully realize...adults have wisdom...talk to a trusted adult about your negative feelings, if they persist. Your life is a gift. Treasure it.*



15. If you want others to like you, start by liking yourself. *Now that may sound very silly. Does it? Of course you like yourself! Do you like yourself all of the time?*

*When we make good choices, we like what we did. When we make bad choices and hurt others, we may not like ourselves for a while. We might feel guilty. Our self-talk might sound like this, “I hate myself! I am no good! I am just a loser! I am worthless!”*

*When you are not feeling good about yourself, it’s easier to continue to make bad choices. Consequently, you need to talk to an adult or friend, whose good behavior you admire, about your feelings, and then end the bad choices. This will end your negative self-talk, and you will feel better, and be better! You will like yourself, and others will like you too.*

Unfortunately, there are *toxic choices* and *toxic people* in the world. Toxic means *poisonous*. Drugs not prescribed for health reasons can be toxic to your body.

*People that sell illegal drugs are toxic people. If we really like ourselves, it’s easier for us to make good choices. We don’t have to do toxic things to feel accepted by others. We strive to do positive things and treat everyone with kindness and respect. After awhile, that’s how most people will treat us. It’s not always easy to do the right thing or act positively, but it’s worth the effort. When you like yourself, the world is an amazing place. Life is what you make it. If life seems “boring” to you, then find positive ways to make it more interesting. You can dream about being a champion.*

16. **“Part of being a champ is acting like one.”** That’s great advice. But what athlete is speaking here?

Answer: Nancy Kerrigan, American figure skating champion. *She also said, “You have to learn how to win and not run away when you lose. Everyone has bad stretches and real successes. Either way, you have to be careful not to lose your confidence or get too confident.”*

*When I played softball and made a good catch, I never did any celebration dances or jigs. I just let a smile creep across my face. Was I being modest? Yes! But more importantly, I knew that the next ground ball could go right between my legs, even without hitting a pebble along the way. I accepted my great plays and errors in stride. I had a firm grasp of reality. Life is like a trampoline: one second you’re up, the next you’re down.*

One of my favorite athletes, who will remain nameless here, says of himself, **“I was the best player I ever saw play.”** Maybe that’s true, but it shouldn’t come from his lips. *Truly modest champs are thankful for their talents and high level of play—thankful to their parents, coaches, and teammates. They know how to act like champs, not chumps.*

17. **It’s okay to follow what you think is right, even if others think that you are wrong.** This is called, **“Being true to yourself.”** Have you ever heard this before? For the longest time I didn’t this understand anyone would *lie to himself or herself*. But I think that I know what it means now. *When you have tough decisions to make, you do what you think is right. That is, you don’t do the easy thing.*

*For example, it might be easy to cheat on a test you forgot to study for, but it might be hard to forget that you cheated. It might nag and nag at you. Is that worth the price of cheating? It might be fun to hang around with older friends. However, if they want you to shoplift with them at the mall, it's time to call mom for a ride home! It's the smart thing to do. When someone pushes you around at school, you may want to haul off and hit that person. If you told a teacher about what was going on, some of your friends might consider you a "tattle-tale." Instead you might consider smacking that teaser. As soon as you do that, you would be in a fight. Kids that fight in school are usually suspended. I know. I have tutored many suspended students.*

*They usually say, "The other kid started it." If you are true to yourself, you do what's right, even if some of your friends temporarily think less of you or give you a hard time. Fighting in school is never the right answer to solving a problem. Find other ways to stick up for friends or yourself.*

*Don't throw the first or the second punch. Once you throw a punch, you will be suspended just like the other student. The principal doesn't care who threw the first punch. What should you do instead of punching back? Move away from those that are bothering you. Avoid them in the hallways or the cafeteria whenever possible. And if avoidance doesn't solve the problem, report their annoying behavior to those who can help.*

**18. Work is a good four-letter word: w-o-r-k.** Thomas Edison, a great inventor said, "*Genius is 99% perspiration and 1% imagination.*" *The adults and kids we see making positive headlines in the newspapers*

*and on TV are never overnight successes. They spend years developing and practicing their talents.* They work passionately doing what they love—in rain, shine, or lack of electricity. *While Edison was trying to invent the light bulb, he did over 10,000 experiments before he was successful. He never whined about failing over 10,000 times because with each little failure he learned what would not burn brightly inside his light bulb, which was rather important.*

*What is Edison really saying in his quote? He's saying that hard work is much more important than being somewhat smarter than someone else. It's the w-o-r-k that will make great things happen such as the invention of the light bulb. Yes, imagination is important, too. Edison had it, and so did Walt Disney, the inventor of Mickey Mouse and Disneyland. He said that we should never forget what it's like to be a twelve-year-old. That's excellent advice from a brilliant man.*

*Walt Disney also said, "Every child is born blessed with a vivid imagination. But just as a muscle grows flabby with disuse, so the bright imagination of a child pales [fades out] in later years if he ceases to exercise it." Walt Disney would be proud of you if you continue to use your imagination.*

**19. The game isn't over until the last roll of the ball.** *I have always believed this. In the wonderful world of sports I have seen some amazing comebacks, but here's a personal story for you. I once bowled in a teacher-bowling league. On the last day of the bowling season, we had to win all three games from the first place team to wind up in first place.*

*We lost the very first game. The captain of the other team told me that we should “stop trying.” In other words, we had no chance of winning first place. Instead, I bowled two of my best games ever. We easily won the last two games. At least I had the satisfaction of doing my best.*

*A few days later the secretary of the league was checking the bowling scores and found an adding mistake in the first game. It turned out that we won that game, first place, and the trophies! Why? We never gave up—even after supposedly losing.*

**20. Never say never!** What does this mean? It’s a funny way of saying that we can’t be sure of that many things in life. As we grow older and more mature, things change. You can say, “**I’ll never be good at math.**” But I bet you can, if you get some extra help from your teacher or parent. You can say, “**I’ll never make friends.**” Yet, if you look in the **Appendix A**, you will find “**How to Make and Keep a Friend.**”

*Use some of those tips and you probably will make friends. Give it a try, if you think you need more friends. You can say, “I’ll never make the team.” But, if you really practice, especially over the summer, maybe you will make the team.*

*Your body is growing stronger and bigger each day. You never know how tall or strong you’re going to be until you stop growing taller, and the mind never stops growing. Michael Jordan wasn’t good enough to make his school team, but he turned out to be an outstanding professional player. He never gave up his dream of playing professional basketball.*

*Then there are those silly things that we say that we will NEVER DO that we see older people doing. I remember promising myself that I would never dye my hair or comb my thinning hair from one side to the other side. I promised myself I would never laugh at my own jokes louder than anyone else. I remember my Uncle Jimmy laughing with a friend, and I asked, “What was so funny?”*

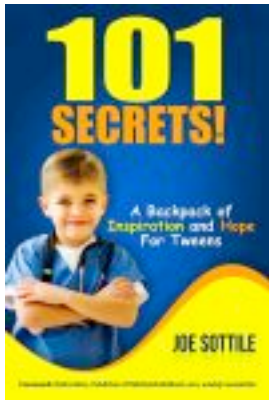
*He said, “I don’t know.”*

*Good one, eh?*

*After I had written 101 SECRETS!—the whole book—I realized that I left out two very important secrets. There are two exceptions to the “Never Say Never!” secret, and I have squeezed them in here to make things right.*

***Bonus 1: If parents divorce, it’s never the fault of the children. Never blame yourself if your parents divorce. Your parents are grown-ups. They have a serious relationship problem, and they decided it was unsolvable. You’re not the blame, nor can you fix the marriage. Trying to fix it is useless. It really is, and I hate saying that. Sorry! Reality stings at times.***

***Bonus 2: If you were adopted, never blame yourself for being given up by your biological parents. You didn’t do anything wrong. How can a baby do anything wrong? A baby is God’s hope for a better world. Babies can’t do anything wrong. Your biological parents were probably too young to care for you. Sorry, again.***



*This book is Joe's legacy to his five grandchildren. It's a way of giving back some "smarts" he learned. Joe asked Debra Ross, who's a popular homeschooler, writer, editor and creator of the KOA weekly newsletter, to write a Foreword. Debra's "Foreword" explains clearly why the book is useful to readers.*

# 101 SECRETS!

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