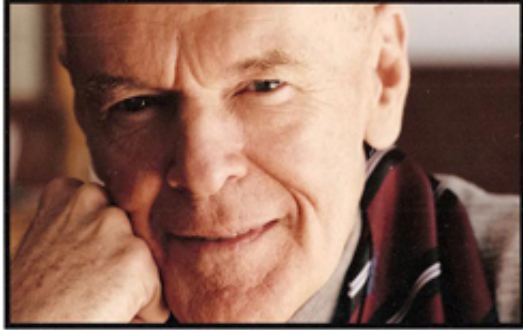


## WHAT'S YOUR STORY, RICHARD PECK?



My first years of school were during World War II. In fact I marched into kindergarten the week Hitler marched into Poland. But I was better prepared than he. I'd had a mother who read to me, and so I couldn't wait to get to first grade. I thought we'd be reading by the end of the first day.

That didn't quite happen, but by the end of that year, somehow, we could all read, all forty of us in Miss Welch's room. Possibly because it would

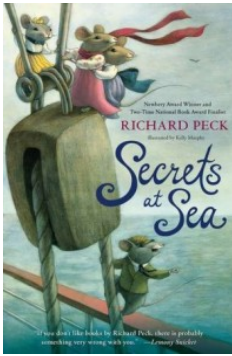
have been unpatriotic not to.

The theme of every school day was The War Effort, and every kid was expected to play a part. We spit-shined the shoes we wore with our Cub Scout uniforms. In music class we learned "Nothing Can Stop the Army Air Corps" and the "Marine Hymn."

We recycled everything in sight. And we learned geography, still my favorite subject, from classroom maps, bristling with pins where the war was happening.



Years later I was a soldier, in Germany, and I saw for myself all that geography, all that history we'd learned in our wartime classrooms. But that's what schooling is: a road map pointing toward your future.



### *What were you afraid of?*

I don't want to say it out loud, but you'll find it somewhere in [Secrets At Sea](#). Something that makes me really, really afraid. Really.

### *Did you play an instrument?*

I did. It was the Sousaphone. I was stuck with the biggest, heaviest instrument in the marching band because I was six feet tall in the seventh grade.

I staggered under that thing all the way through high school and marched down the football field on Illinois nights so cold our lips stuck to the mouthpieces. I was not very musical.

### *Do you have a special place to write?*

I do. When I was young and dreaming, I dreamed of living high up in a building overlooking the glittering electric skyline of New York City. My dream came true, and here I am this moment at my writing desk looking out over the nighttime city, sparkling with light and stories.