Horatio Alger

Horatio Alger, Jr. was born in Revere, Massachusetts on January 13, 1832, and grew up in a Calvinist home with a strong focus on education and religion. He graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Harvard Divinity School in 1852. During the Harvard days he studied under renowned writer Henry Wadsworth Longfellow with the intention of one day becoming a poet.

Horatio as a student at Harvard

In his twenties, he was rejected by the Union Army because of his asthma. His interests shifted him toward teaching as well as becoming a newspaper correspondent for the Boston Transcript and the New York Sun newspapers.

His religious training was tested over the years when he relocated to Paris. In 1864, he returned to America and became a Unitarian minister then later a social service worker in New York.

Manhattan was the city of the Gilded Age. Along with the beautiful buildings and lavishly dressed people, there were the poor and homeless. New York had become like Paris and London and Rome. Thousands of terribly poor people lived in miserable circumstances. It was in these ghettos where he first saw the plight of the poor and homeless. Hundreds of children, just like those found in other large cities,

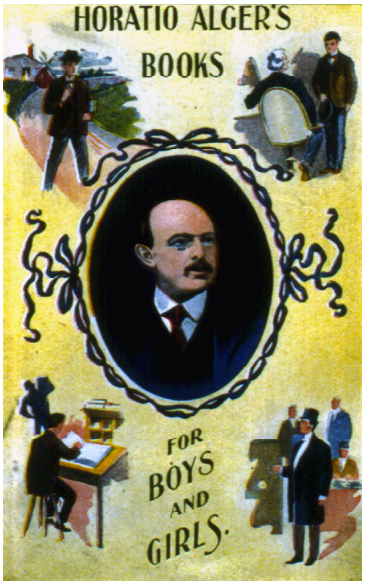
were abandoned and left to die in the streets.

Children in an American slum.

One social worker, Etta Angel Wheeler, found an answer when she came upon a child wandering naked and unclaimed. The legal authorities to which she appealed refused aid. In desperation, she turned to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which determined that, "the child being an animal," it would grant shelter and protection.

Among this scene of devastating poverty is where Alger developed his rags-to-riches theme for his soon to be popular books. He was to become the nineteenth century preacher on the gospel of success.

Alger captured the essence, emotion, soul and especially the spirit of an emerging America. His books all had the same message: no matter who they were, poor, orphaned or powerless, that if they would persevere, if they would do their best, if they would always try to do the right thing, they would succeed.



Alger published many books

As a grown man, Alger was a small, stoop-shouldered man with a big heart.

Through honesty, hard work, and strong determination, the American Dream was available to anyone willing to make the journey.

Alger wrote more than 134 enormously successful dime novels targeted primarily at young boys.

This boy could have been the hero of one of Alger's books.

In each of his books, the theme was pretty much the same. It usually focused on a young teenage boy, from a poor and disadvantaged family who would overcome numerous obstacles along the way and triumph to build his own American Dream against the odds.

Alger's publication, Boy's Home Weekly, was enormously successful.

His three most popular titles consisted of the Ragged Dick series, beginning in 1867, the Luck and Pluck series, first printed in 1869 and the Tattered Tom series which first appeared in 1871.

In the late nineteenth century, Alger was one of America's best selling authors alongside

Samuel Clemmons, better know as author Mark Twain. It was Mark Twain who once said, “The man who does not read books has no advantage over the man who can’t read them.”

Horatio Alger, through his books became the greatest salesman of the American Dream ever. Who knows, maybe you, your spouse or one of your children may one day become the next Horatio Alger success story as we journey toward the unlimited opportunities ahead in the twenty-first century.