

# Thomas Paine: *An American Patriot*

Based on a manuscript by Mae Kramer Silver

*Last week* ~ Chapter 4

**The Secret Is Revealed** Thomas Paine's young friend, Anna, guesses that he is the writer of *Common Sense*.

*Chapter 5* ~

## The Times That Try Men's Souls

It did, in fact, take some time for the thoughts of independence of the colonies from England to be voiced.

When Thomas Paine first met Benjamin Franklin in London, England, the elder statesman was trying to smooth over relations with the mother country.

He was trying to voice the concerns of the people who lived in the colonies ... concerns such as paying taxes to the English with nothing in return, wanting well-qualified people to run the local governments, disliking the English laws that were prohibiting free trade in the colonies and costing them money.

After Thomas Paine came to Philadelphia, Franklin followed the next September.

When they met again, it was actually Franklin who first asked Paine to write something about the English-American relations.

Paine then wrote a pamphlet he titled *The Plain Truth*.

However, another friend, Dr. Benjamin Rush, thought *Common Sense* would be a better fit for the American colonists.

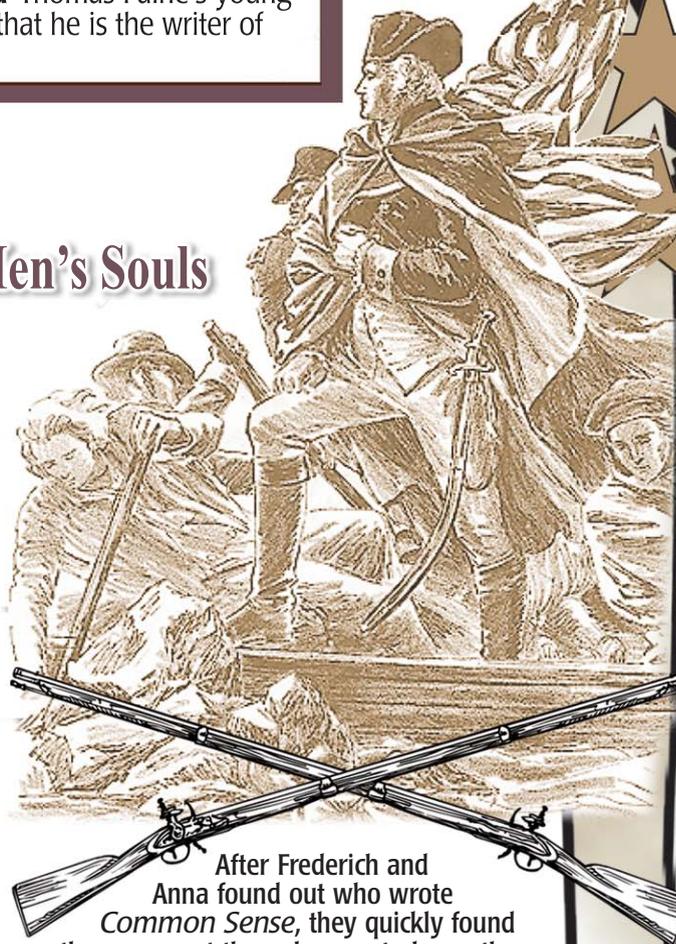
Paine delivered his work to Philadelphia printer Robert Bell for printing, and *Common Sense* hit the streets on January 10, 1776.

This was the start of a very important year for the colonies and for Thomas Paine.

It was Paine's pen, and others, that would spread the words of independence until July 1776, when the Declaration of Independence was finally saying it all— independence for all the colonies.

And after that, when Paine went to war, that pen was still working, stirring the troops to keep going and finish the deed.

His articles were published in Philadelphia's newspapers throughout the war.



After Frederick and Anna found out who wrote *Common Sense*, they quickly found they were not the only ones to know the secret.

The days passed, and the frozen winter streets of the city turned mushy under the spring rains and then hard under the summer sun.

All the time, the colonies were seething with unrest.

It was on a hot summer day of 1776, in a corner of his father's bookshop, that Frederick found his sister Anna crying softly. She held *Common Sense* in her lap.

"Anna," he said. "What is wrong?"

"Mr. Paine has joined the army. He has gone to war," she said. "We shall never see him again."

"Oh, no, Anna," said Frederick, as he put his arm around her shoulders. Frederick's arms at his age of 15 had suddenly become very long. He was surprised and proud at their growth, but felt a little awkward.

"He will come back," Frederick said.

"Uncle Amos went to war and now he is in heaven.

"We will never see him again on earth," Anna replied.

Frederich took a piece of their mother's bread from Anna's basket and gave it to her. But Anna's tears made the bread salty and mushy before she ate it.

"Anna, Uncle Amos took his gun to the war. Mr. Paine has not taken a gun," said Frederick.

Anna stopped crying and eating. "What has he taken?"

Frederich took a pen from his father's desk and held it high.

"Mr. Thomas Paine has taken his pen to war!"

Paine joined the Continental Army and became aide-de-camp to Gen. Nathaniel Greene. He wrote and read orders and letters for the general.

Paine not only thanked and encouraged the American troops during the Revolutionary War, but he wrote details about the retreat of Washington's Army. Never before had reports of battles been so timely printed in newspapers.

He wrote on the front line of the battles of the war and so became America's first war correspondent.

Anna's blue eyes grew large and she smiled.

Paine had witnessed the terrible retreat of the Continental Army in December, 1776 at Ft. Lee, New Jersey.

He followed them on that retreat that wound its way through what is now Bergen County, past the Hackensack River and what is now the Steuben House on its shores, and on to the Delaware River.

When he saw how heartbroken the soldiers felt, he wrote the first of his 13 *The American Crisis* articles.

In an area around northern New Jersey, on a drumhead one night by the campfire, he wrote:

**"These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman."**

When Thomas Paine returned to Philadelphia to have the first of his *Crisis*

articles printed, he took time to see Anna and Frederick at the bookshop.

He talked to Anna, who worried about his safety: "I knew the time when thought that the whistling of a cannonball would have frightened me almost to death; but I have since tried it, and I find I can stand it with a little composure...."

General Washington ordered *Crisis* I read to all his men before crossing the Delaware River just north of Trenton, N.J., on Christmas Night, 1776.

Thomas Paine's words lifted the spirits of those tired, poorly clothed soldiers and sparked their resolve to fight on. Their American victory in Trenton, against an army of German mercenaries, the Hessians, truly stunned the watching world.

The European military strategists scratched their heads. How could the rag-tag Americans beat the best of the European-trained expert soldiers?

Even though Paine reported about the war, strategies, outcomes, etc., he also wrote his feelings about the war and always stressed how important it was for the colonies to act together in unity.

**"I call not upon a few, but upon all; not on this state or that state, but on every state: up and help us; lay your shoulders to the wheel; better to have too much force than too little, when so great an object is at stake."**

By then, everyone knew that Thomas Paine had written *Common Sense*, so Paine signed his *Crisis* articles with his new pen name, Common Sense.

*Q&A*

**Comprehension Question:** What did Paine arm himself with at war? Why?

**NIE Activity:** Paine was "America's first war correspondent" writing articles published in Philadelphia's newspapers. Search the newspaper and locate articles by newspaper war correspondents.

**Essay Question:** During the war Paine wrote articles instead of fighting. Which would have been more valuable to the revolutionary cause?

**Serialized Story Guide for Teachers, Students and Families:** [www.njreadforlife.org/paineguide.html](http://www.njreadforlife.org/paineguide.html)

Designed by Terry Bellucci

*Next week* ~ Chapter 6

**Patriots Flee, But Fight Back** As the British occupy Philadelphia, Paine and other patriots flee the city and hatch plans for an attack.

Read more about Thomas Paine: [www.njreadforlife.org/paine.html](http://www.njreadforlife.org/paine.html)