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The Inventive Adventures of

Oonga Frank

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# Oonga Frank



by Jon S. Breen

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# Book 1

## Oonga Frank Invents Porridge









# Greetings

## from Jon

As illustrated in our cover, the stories of Oonga Frank and his nephew, Eli, are about difference. A different life, a different time, and different needs. A place where all problems are puzzles to be solved...for the characters and for you, the reader. A place where everything is new. *What should we call this new thing? How could that work better? How do we do that? Why make the effort?*

These stories began to take shape over 30 years ago, when my own son was a little boy and needed to know the “why” of everything. However, he never did ask about my crutches. They were just part of the package.

I hope you enjoy this and future stories. As you will see, there is still much to do... planting crops, building a potter’s wheel, carrying fire, and, of course, how they learned to make clothes that didn’t fall down. Now, what could we call that thing?





# Chapter 1

## Time for Breakfast

Oonga Frank lived a very, very long time ago when everyone lived in caves. That was because nobody knew how to make tents or build houses. But Oonga Frank had figured out that living in a cave was much better than just standing around outside or living under a tree.

You could keep all your stuff in your cave. It stayed dry inside when it rained. And, with a bright, little fire burning near the entrance, your cave was safe from the big, scary animals that lived in those days. These were the reasons that everybody had decided to live in caves after Oonga Frank had figured it out. Because of where they lived, the people were called the Cave Guys.











One summer morning, Oonga Frank was sitting outside his cave, thinking about what he was going to eat for breakfast. He decided that today's breakfast would be little round things cooked in bubbly water with some honey stirred in. That's what Oonga Frank called it until he made up a better name for this breakfast. It was quite a simple thing to make, but only if you knew how to do it.

First, Oonga Frank put a few more sticks on the fire so it would get hotter... hot enough to make the bubbles in the water. Then he put a clay pot right on top of the burning sticks. It did not look like regular pots. There were two holes through the sides, right near the top, on opposite sides of the pot. Each hole was big enough for Oonga Frank to stick his smallest finger through.

Oonga Frank sat back down at his little round table. Right beside the table was another clay pot. This one was very large, as tall as Oonga Frank was when he was sitting on the ground. It had a flat lid that fit over the top to keep out rain and any little creatures that might like to eat what was inside.

Oonga Frank lifted off the lid from the large clay pot and reached way down because the pot was almost empty. He filled his bowl with the little round things that were in the pot. Then he poured





them into the water that had already started to make bubbles. In just a little while, the little round things got all puffy looking and were ready to eat.

Oonga Frank picked up a special stick that was leaning against the side of the table and poked the end right through the two holes in the pot. This was a good way to move a hot pot off the fire. It had taken Oonga Frank three cups of tea to figure that out.

Oonga Frank took his wooden spoon from the shelf beside the table, and scooped his breakfast from his cooking pot to his eating bowl. After he poured on a bit of honey from the honey pot, his breakfast was ready to eat. Just as Oonga Frank was about to start eating his nice, warm breakfast, along came his nephew, Eli Frank, from the cave next door. “Hi, Uncle Oonga”, said Eli Frank, “What are you eating?”

“Little round things and honey”, said Oonga Frank. “Are you hungry?”

“That’s what I had! And I had the red berries on top.” said Eli Frank, as he sat down beside his uncle. “But, maybe you could tell me the story about how you invented eating little round things again.”

Oonga Frank smiled as he leaned over and mussed up his nephew's curly hair. "One day, my young Eli, you are going to invent all kinds of wonderful stuff. The little round things will seem like nothing at all."

"Please, Uncle Oonga, said Eli Frank, holding up his hand, "and don't forget to start with the part about the fingers."

"All right", said Oonga Frank. "Here we go."



## Chapter 2

### Honkers and Little Round Things

One day, as many years ago as all of the regular fingers plus the sideways finger on one hand, Oonga Frank had been out gathering wood for his fire. It had been the time of year when he had to start thinking about keeping his cave warm. He knew the cold times were coming soon. It always got cold after the big honking birds flew away. On that day, even the little honkers were practicing their flying, getting ready to go.

He was sure that the honkers were launched from a huge bow to help them on their journey. Why else would they fly in the shape of an arrowhead? There must also be another huge bow somewhere else because they always came back pointing the other way. Just in time to land in all the little lakes when the water had gone soft again.

Sometimes, Oonga Frank would wonder how that far away archer knew when to point the honkers back on their way. The honkers wouldn't have been too happy if the water was still hard when they came back.

That day long ago, as he was out gathering firewood, Oonga Frank came to a place that he had never seen before. It was quite far from his cave, just in front of the high mountain ridge that hid the honkers' giant bow. This new place was a little meadow beside a lake. Right near the middle of the meadow were two trees that had fallen over across each other. Everywhere else, the meadow was full of some strange plants with narrow leaves and fuzzy tops.

Oonga Frank stood at the edge of the meadow thinking about all the firewood he would be able to take back to his cave when he chopped up the two trees that had fallen down. Just then, a family of honkers paddled right up to the edge of the lake and waddled over to the meadow. They all started pulling something off the plants and gobbling them up as fast as they could.

These plants all looked exactly the same and were all about one Oonga knee tall. Oonga Frank thought that this was very lucky for the honkers because they were also about one Oonga knee



tall. Standing very still, Oonga Frank watched the honkers eat and eat and eat.

After the honkers had eaten enough, they all waddled back to the lake. Oonga Frank decided to look more closely at these strange plants. Each one, underneath the fuzzy parts, had a bunch of little round things stuck to the stem. He picked off a few of the little round things and put them in his mouth. They did not have much taste to them at all. When he bit down on them, Oonga Frank found that they were too hard and crunchy. These, he decided, were not something that he could eat.

Since he had never seen this kind of plant before, Oonga Frank thought that he should take some back to his cave so he could look at them more carefully. Then he would see what he could see. But first, he chopped up the two trees with his chopping rock and tied the pieces into bundles with pieces of rope that he had made from grass. Back he went to his cave with his first bundle. All day long, he went back and forth between his cave and the meadow, carrying bundles of firewood.

By the time he came back to the little meadow for the last bundle, Oonga Frank was getting very tired. After hoisting the last bundle onto his shoulder, he reached down for a handful of the new plants

to take home. But the load was too big and, just as he reached for the handful of plants, he tripped. All of the wood and the plants that he had picked went flying all over the place.

As Oonga Frank picked everything up again, he noticed that many of the little round things had fallen off the plants and landed on the bare ground right where the trees had been lying. Oh well, he thought, there are still lots left on the plants to look at. And away he went with his bundle of firewood and his interesting, new plants.



# Chapter 3

## A New Idea

When he got home, Oonga Frank stacked up all of his wood neatly beside the entrance to his cave. Now he was getting hungry. Today, like most other days, he made soup with dried meat for lunch. He had invented soup a few years before and now all the Cave Guys had dried meat soup for lunch, and sometimes for breakfast and supper, too. It was easy to make, much better tasting and easier to chew than just plain dried meat.

Oonga Frank poured some water into his pot with the two holes in it and put it on the fire to heat up. Then he reached into a big leather bag that was hanging near the fire, pulled out a handful of thin strips of dried meat, and dropped them into the hot water. He put the strange new plants on his little round table so he could look at them more closely while he ate his lunch.

But something unexpected happened. Some of the little round things rolled off the table and fell into the soup. As soon as the water started to make its bubbles, the little round things floated to the top of the soup where Oonga Frank could see them. They looked different somehow, bigger and puffy. How interesting, he thought.

Oonga Frank scooped the little round things out of the pot with his wooden spoon and looked at them more closely. He squeezed one between his fingers. It felt soft. He sniffed at it. He decided to taste the little round things again. They tasted GOOD. How wonderful, he thought, this is a new food. And it doesn't try to run away or bite you! No wonder the honkers were gobbling these up as fast as they could.

In those days, all of the Cave Guys hunted and fished for their food. It was often very difficult to catch and could be very dangerous, depending on the kind of food they were trying to catch. Oonga Frank realized that finding food that didn't try to run away or bite you was a wonderful thing. It would keep the Cave Guys from being hungry when there weren't many animals to hunt or when the lakes were too hard for fishing.

Oonga Frank knew he needed to figure out how to collect more of these little round things before the honkers had all been launched from their giant bow. Because then the cold would come and cover everything up with the fluffy white stuff. There would be no little round things to be found then!

Oonga Frank knew exactly what he must do. Since he only had one cooking pot, he quickly ate his soup and then put the pot back on the fire and added some more water. When it made the bubbles, he poured the water into his clay cup and added the special dried leaves that his mother had shown him how to gather. Soon, as the leaves soaked in the hot water, it would turn into tea.



While the leaves were soaking in the water, Oonga Frank got down his honey jar from its special shelf and poured a tiny bit of honey into his cup. When everything was ready, he sat down at his little round table, and drank his tea, and thought and thought and thought. And then he knew what he had to do. He had to invent a special tool for gathering up the little round things.

All that evening, until it got too dark to see, Oonga Frank made his new tool. First, he bent a long, thin branch of a special tree into a circle that was a little bit bigger around than he was. He fastened the ends together with a piece of rope that he had made by twisting together long pieces of grass. Oonga Frank thought for a moment that the Cave Kids who lived in the next cave might like to have something like this to play with. But, enough of that for now!

Using his special cutting rock, Oonga Frank cut out a big round circle from a piece of leather that was rolled up and stored inside his cave. With his sewing rock, Oonga Frank poked holes all around the edge of the round piece of leather and sewed the edges to the bent branch circle. When he was done, he had a big bag that was held open at the top by the circle of branch. But there was still one more thing to do. Oonga Frank tied another long piece of rope to the sides of the bent branch.

He stood up and put the rope over his neck. The big bag now hung open in front of him. The top of the bag was just even with his knees. Satisfied and tired, Oonga Frank hung the bag up on a branch, put away his tools, and went to sleep in his nice warm cave.





# Chapter 4

## Will It Work?

The next morning, bright and early, Oonga Frank, got up from his sleeping mat. He put on his working wrap, the one with the shoulder strap and the extra put-its. As he ate his breakfast soup, what did he see but a bunch of honkers flapping and honking as they were launched from the big bow that was hidden behind the mountain. As they flapped their wings, they looked like they were waving goodbye. Oonga Frank waved back. But now it was time to hurry back to the meadow where the little round things were. The fluffy white stuff would surely be coming soon.

As Oonga Frank got ready to leave his cave, he thought about all the things he needed to take with him. He would need the big gathering bag he had just invented and his tool bag full of tools. In his tool bag were his chopping rock, his cutting rock, his scraping rock, his fire starting rocks, and a piece of grass rope. And he must not forget his lunch bag.

Off he went with all his stuff. If you had been there, you would have heard him whistling as he walked along. Oonga Frank had just invented whistling that year and he liked to practice whenever he could.

On his way to the place where the little round things were, Oonga Frank stopped to chop off a tree branch with his chopping rock and cut it into two pieces with his cutting rock. Each piece was an Oonga knee long and an Oonga sideways finger thick. He used his scraping rock to take off all the bark and make each piece nice and smooth.

As he walked along, Oonga Frank practiced with his new tools. He flipped them in the air, spun them around and tapped them together. He even tapped them all along the edge of his big gathering bag. Oonga Frank noticed how pleasant they sounded when he tapped them like that.

Oonga Frank started tapping the two sticks on everything. On rocks, on tree branches and even, as he got near the meadow, on a piece of hollow log that lay across the trail. That turned out to be quite a wonderful surprise. The sound was big and deep and loud. Like nothing he had ever heard before. Ba-room, ba-room, ba-room it went. This was something to think about after he



gathered up the little round things. But enough of that for now! He hurried on to where the little round things were.

Pretty soon, Oonga Frank was back at the meadow where the plants with the little round things grew. Now it was time to see if his idea was going to work. This was the best part about thinking up new ideas – seeing if they worked. As he always remembered from the time when he was a boy and had invented measuring, the best ideas did not always work very well right away. But, enough of that for now!

This time, everything worked out just like Oonga Frank thought it would. He put down his tool bag and all of his tool rocks in one corner of the meadow. Then he put on his gathering bag so it hung down in front of him. As he walked along one side of the meadow, the plants with the little round things were pushed up against his gathering bag. Oonga Frank used one of his tool sticks to bend the tops of the plants over the hoop at the top of the bag. With the other stick, he tapped the tops of the plants until the little round things fell into the bag.

As he walked along, Oonga Frank kept adjusting his speed of walking and tapping until he could step, tap, step, tap all the way across the meadow without missing any of the little round









things. When he got to the end, he turned around and came back the other way. This worked so well, that by the time he reached the middle of the meadow, his gathering bag was full. Now, what to do with all of these little round things? The sky was starting to fill with clouds. If the fluffy white stuff fell down, the rest of the little round things would be covered up. It must be time for some tea.



# Chapter 5

## Remember the Mouse

And that's what Oonga Frank did. He unpacked his lunch bag, took out his little clay travelling pot, his special leaves for tea and his fire starting rocks. There was a little pile of leaves and twigs left over from the trees he had cut the day before. So, with a few taps on the fire starting rocks, Oonga Frank sent tiny sparks flying onto the leaves and twigs. In no time at all, a small fire was crackling away. Filling his clay pot with water from the lake beside the meadow, Oonga Frank put it on the fire to heat up. In went the special leaves into the pot.

There was something else inside his lunch bag. It was a big, folded up leaf tied with a piece of grass. Oonga Frank unfolded the leaf and picked up a small stick. He scraped off some of the honey he had stuck to the leaf so he could have it in his tea. After he had put the honey into his tea bowl, Oonga Frank carefully folded up



the leaf and tied it up again with the piece of grass. He put it back in the bag and took out a small piece of dried meat to have with his tea.

Now, he thought, I need to figure out what to do about these little round things. So, he sat down on the ground and drank his tea, and thought and thought and thought. And, when he was finished, he knew exactly what to do. He ran back to the place where he had found the hollow log and carried it back to the meadow. It wasn't even very heavy because it was hollow.

When he got back to the meadow, Oonga Frank emptied out all of the tools from his tool pouch and put them beside his bag full of little round things. He picked up his scraping rock and scraped the inside of the hollow log until it was nice and smooth. Standing the log up on one end, Oonga Frank pulled his tool bag down over the end of the log as far as it would go and tied it tightly with a piece of his grass rope. It stretched smoothly across the end of the log and Oonga Frank tapped his fingers on it to make sure it was tight.

To his surprise, it made a deep, low sound. A sound that was quite different from tapping on the log with the sticks. He started tapping quickly with both hands, first one, then the other, back and forth, back and forth. The log was making a sound like

oong-ga, oong-ga as he tapped faster and faster until his hands were tired. But, enough of that for now!

Turning the log over so the open end was up, he reached over to pick up the gathering bag full of little round things. What did he see but a little mouse sitting right on the top of the pile of little round things, eating as fast as it could. Everything wants to eat these little round things, he thought. Go gather your own, he said to the mouse as it ran away.

Picking up the gathering bag, Oonga Frank poured all the little round things into the log and filled it right up to the top. With the gathering bag empty, away he went up and down the rest of the meadow, step, tap, step, tap. Finally, he had collected all of the little round things and his bag was full again. Oonga Frank gathered everything up, filled his put-its with all of his tools, and headed off for home.

It was almost dark by the time Oonga Frank arrived back at his cave. But he still wasn't finished. He remembered the mouse and how much it had liked his little round things. He didn't want to wake up and find a fat round mouse in his bag. But he needed to figure out what to do with all of the little round things so nothing would eat them while he slept.

There was only one thing to do. Oonga Frank started a little fire in the fire pit just outside his cave, filled up his pot with water and put it on the fire so it would make its bubbles. While he was waiting, Oonga Frank put away his tools and his lunch bag. By the time he had finished, the water was ready.

So Oonga Frank made some tea and sat down at his little round table. He drank his tea, and thought and thought and thought. Then he knew exactly what to do. Tomorrow, he would go down to the stream that ran near his cave and dig up enough clay to make a very large pot. It would be a very special pot – with a new thing on its top. That would be a flat piece of clay that fit right over the top of the pot so no little creatures could get inside. Oonga Frank had never made a pot with a top thing before. Until today, he had never even thought about top things.



# Chapter 6

## Old Things and New Food

Until he finished making his big pot with the new top, Oonga Frank needed to do something else to keep the little creatures from eating the little round things. But he would have to hurry because it was almost dark. So, off he went a little ways from his cave to where he kept his collection of things that he might need sometime. He had several worn out tool rocks, a pile of long straight poles, some broken pieces of old pots, and a set of moose antlers. Oonga Frank had picked the antlers up in the forest last spring. He knew that the moose that lived on the other side of the hills put his antlers there every year.

Sometimes Oonga Frank wondered why the moose didn't just keep his old antlers instead of putting them there in the forest every year. Maybe, he thought, the moose just liked growing new ones. But, enough of that for now!

Oonga Frank picked out three of the long straight poles and carried them back inside his cave. He laid the poles down and got his grass rope from its hanging place on the cave wall. Oonga Frank tied the tops of the three poles together. Then, he spread the bottoms of the poles so they stood up by themselves, shaped like a big triangle.

Lying down on the floor of the cave, Oonga Frank moved the poles farther and farther apart until the bottoms were all one Oonga Frank away from each other. He thought that this made a very interesting shape inside the cave. Oonga Frank liked it so much that he went and sat down inside the new shape.

As he looked around, Oonga Frank thought that if this shape had a cover, it would make a sort of portable cave. What an idea, he thought, a portable cave. But, no time for that now! The little round things needed to be put away.

Off he went and carried the gathering bag and the hollow log full of little round things into the cave. Oonga Frank used the end of the rope to tie the gathering bag and the hollow log up so they hung high up off the floor. Now, he thought, no little mouse is going to have little round things for a snack. And, with that, Oonga Frank went to his sleeping mat at the back of the cave, covered









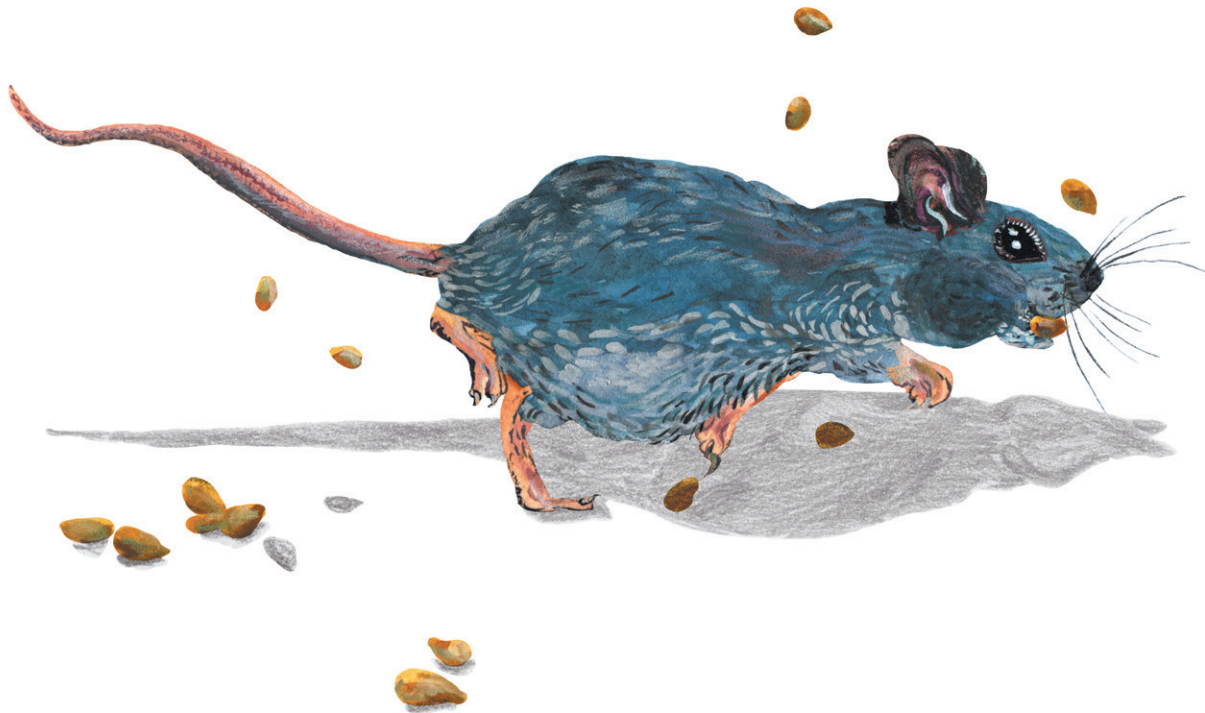
himself up with his nice warm sleeping robe and quickly fell asleep.

In the morning, Oonga Frank made a new fire, and put on a pot of water to cook his breakfast. This morning, for the first time, instead of dried meat, he put in a handful of the little round things. He was very happy. The lives of the Cave Guys would be very different from now on.

At last, it was time to eat his new food.



The little round things and the water had turned into a new thing. It was thicker than water, a bit lumpy and was the colour of dried grass. Oonga Frank decided to call it bow-ridge. That way he would always remember that he had found the little round things right in front of the place where the geese were launched every year. And that is how Oonga Frank invented porridge.





# Chapter 7

## On To New Things

“That was just right, Uncle Oonga,” said Eli Frank. “I’d better go home now. We’re going to gather wood today.”

“Make sure you wear the special things on your arms so you don’t scratch yourself carrying the sticks,” said Oonga Frank.

“Uncle Oonga, there must be a better way to carry the wood than just piling it up on your arms,” said Eli Frank. “Maybe I should go home and...”

“Sit at your little round table, drink some tea, and think and think and think,” said Oonga Frank.

“Bye, Uncle Oonga.”

“Bye, Eli.”



# About The Author



During the time that Jon has developed the Oonga Frank series, he has operated private businesses, worked as a government official, and managed community, not-for-profit agencies. Most of his work has been related to matters of disability – providing training, developing mobility aids, creating employment opportunities, and engaging in policy and community development.

Jon’s recreational activities have included wood-working, canoeing and kayaking, archery, and a brief but spectacular attempt at downhill skiing. He has also been a member of the Canadian National Wheelchair Racquetball Team.

In 2013, Jon received the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Anniversary Medal for his community service work. He currently lives in Victoria,

British Columbia with his wife, Vanora, after spending over 20 years in the Yukon. Jon is currently working on his PhD in social work at the University of British Columbia.

If you have any comments about this book, Jon can be reached at [jon@jonbreen.ca](mailto:jon@jonbreen.ca)





**The Oonga Frank stories offer delightful and thought provoking explanations to the questions that continuously bubble to the surface of young minds. Why does this happen? What is that thing? Where does it come from? All of the Oonga Frank stories offer fanciful examples of these most basic questions that engage young readers - and offer ways to develop their own answers.**

**The first of these stories, “Oonga Frank Invents Porridge” , was created over 30 years ago, as a way to entertain and capture the imagination of the author’s young son, Eli. As he did, young readers will find a number of other opportunities for explaining, describing and naming, along with learning the answer to the central question of porridge.**