

A person is walking away from the camera on a gravel path that leads into a field of tall grass. The person is wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt, blue jeans, and brown boots. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day, with a soft glow around the person's legs.

CHARLEY KARNES

INTENSITIES IN TEN CITIES

A Collection of Adventures and Misadventures

Illustrations by Beth Denshain

Intensities in Ten Cities

Charley Karnes

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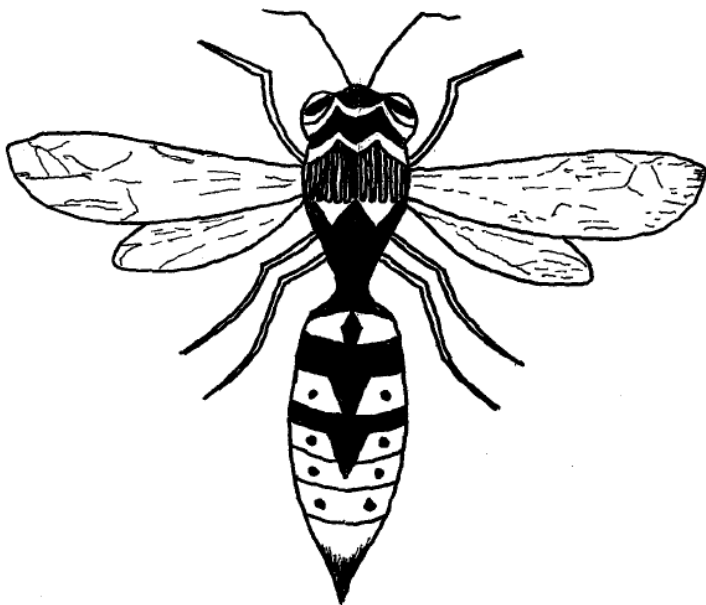
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Which of you to gain (immortality) will risk uncertain pains of Hell?

I will not forgive you, if you will not take the chance.

Jerry Garcia - Terrapin Station

Ow, Sonny Peach!

My school of English is in Buenos Aires. We live three and a half hours away. It's dawn on Monday morning. I'm going in.

Wife and kids (not my wife or kids) made it socially and economically impossible to live in Buenos Aires.

We moved wayyy-out to a town called Wally-wa-choo, Argentina, because it's Texas-Oklahoma beautiful, next to a river, and the kids are away from the "viboras" (snakes) of the big city.

Wally-wa-chooo is one way to live in a nice and safe place about five miles from the Pan Americana, an insane multi-lane highway which provides a straight shot to Buenos Aires.

Wally-wa-choo is a tourist town. There is a nice river. It's amazingly hot in the Summer (December to March).

Wally-wa-choo is quiet and has really good schools. By now, you can tell how much the place is exactly right for the kids.

You can hear the beautiful bells of the church every Sunday, and also on Saturdays in the Summer after weddings.

Wally-wa-choo has a nice riverfront, a third-world sports "club" and a great place for a wife and kids (even if it's not *my* wife or kids).

Flashback to the night before:

(One of my not-my-kids decided to cook everything in the cupboards without water, burn it, and then throw it into the sink, trash can or onto nearby floor.

The other n-m-k decided to cut up darn near every piece of cloth and clothing in the house with her "magic" scissors. Imagine.

The way to "The Big Tango," Buenos Aires (B.A.) is a commuter's nightmare.

I have to be up around 5, shower and get good looking, spread a hefty spoonful of dulce de leche (caramel butter) on a factura (pastry), put on a coat and tie, hoist a big bag of books over my shoulder, run double time to the bus station and pay \$12 to get on the "Transito" which leaves at 7:20 am.

The "Transito" bus follows local roads through what is called the Pampas, and the endless Texas-Oklahoma-style cattle country to the Pan-Americana Highway.

If you Google the word Lawless:

The first thing you should see is a picture and map of the Pan-Americana Highway.

This famously NASCAR-like eight-lane, ten-lane and often 16-lane highway runs from California to Antarctica, or at least the last solid ground in South America that will thaw.

Sooo, It's 7:15 a.m., and I have a big bag of books over my shoulder, wearing a suit, running double-time on the way to the bus station.

At the door of the station, five people (who usually ride the same bus) waved their hands at me. They said: "Si Fwayy..... Si Fwayy mas temprano."

"It's gone, it left earlier."

In the ticket window of the Wally-wa-choo bus station, there is a jagged brown cardboard sign that reads (in Spanish):

"Attention: Passengers of the 7:20 Transito to Buenos Aires"

"This bus (Este Colectivo) will leave Wally-wa-choo at 6:45."

All things understood:

There are nine USA-native teachers of English and 90 students, all adults, very executive, on the way to my school, Excellent English USA in downtown Buenos Aires.

There is one key to that front door. There is one Director of Excellent English USA.

The key is heavy in my pocket.

I've got to get to my little school, no matter what.

Way out in Wally-Waaa Choo-

I got a taxi to take me to the edge of town and DROP ME OFF ON THE PAN AMERICAN HIGHWAY.

The driver (taxista) looked at me twice and said: "You know you're crazy, right?"

"S'tas loco, mi eschusas, che, bien?"

He was right.

Hitching on the Pan-Americana Highway is worse than a death wish.

Some trucks (well, OK, every truck) will see you, and the cardboard sign, and a thumb out.

The truckers smile and jerk the steering wheel hard to the right with a laugh, as if to run over you.

This is great fun for the truck driver.

Not at all for the hitch-hiker wearing coat and tie.

There is a seemingly endless series of waves of dust and rocks going into my clothes and face.

After more than an hour of research, I walked (backwards every damn step) to a truck stop on the Pan Americana.

I was so well-dressed, carrying a bag of books, and encrusted in dirt, they sold me one can of Coke (\$1), laughed at me, and the management had their illiterate jerky boy flunkies personally kick me out of the place.

The key to the door of the school is notably heavy in my pocket.

I've gotta get to my school. Outside, it's 100 degrees in the shade.

But there is no shade.

As a last resort, I pitched a truck driver in the parking lot.

I showed him my dirt-covered satchel of books, pulled out a couple of books, and proved that I can teach English.

"Y, voy a ensenyar, And I'll teach a class of English on the road if you will get me to downtown Buenos Aires."

He looked pretty dumb. I walked away.

He yelled "Bien, Jankee (Yankee) vamos!"

His name was Dio. How appropriate to be riding with God.

Stepping onto *the step* to get into a big rig has a steep learning curve. It's like climbing up a ladder, but the rungs are gone, or in various places. If you miss one, there's a big drop.

Slam the doors.

The huge diesel Ford engine roars.

Seconds later, I was sitting on the navigator side of an 18 wheeler with a windshield as big as the earth and sky combined.

It's a big, mean Ford diesel truck.

The front tires are as slick as a baby's bottom.

Soo, the deal is: "I'm Charley. I teach English. Yo soy professor de Ingles. I call it English. You call it Angla."

"Angla," the truck driver said at 80 plus mph, going into higher gear, and then higher gear.

"Shoo Teechee me Angla."

"That's right, I teechee Angla."

(He got prickly because I was imitating him.)

"Shoo ensenas me Angla, o Jo te dechas!"

("You teach me English, or I will kick you out.")

The word English is pronounced (by the driver) Angla.

If I stop teaching Angla and the crazy truck driver decides he is not learning English (pronounced: Angla), he will "dechar" me, which means kicking me off on the side of the Pan Americana.

I'm still getting used to this kind of craziness.

There is no feeling in the world to compare with being on the navigator side in the bouncing cab of a roaring big rig loaded with 20 tons of steel, a real mean 18-wheeler hurtling down the Pan Americana Highway on the way to Buenos Aires.

I peeled off my crusty jacket, tie and shirt, and was wearing the traditional "wife-beater" t-shirt.

Imagine, hey, the window is down, and you're sticking your right arm out the window. You can put your arm out and make the angle of your arm cause a blast of beautiful air to hit your face and finally cool you off.

Soo, We're rolling with 40,000 pounds (20 tons) of steel at about 90 mph on the way to Buenos Aires.

I was busy teaching the truck driver the last part of the first hour of class and trying to get to my school of Angla.

I had my right arm hanging out of the right window, my hand deflecting air into my smiling face.

And *that's* when the South American hornet stung me.
Wham.

The hornet felt like it was the size of a frigging golf ball. God knows it hit me hard. Must have been a female hornet.

I thought I'd been shot.

The South American hornet stung me in the big dark blue vein on the opposite side of my right elbow.

The soft tender part. Right in the bend of the elbow. Exactly on the vein. Wham!! At first, it felt like a bullet..... And then the venom set in.

The pain is almost overwhelming.

The trucker thought this was really funny. I thought it was excruciating. Also, the venom from the sting immediately started to paralyze my arm, and that made me cuss even more.

I lost all feeling in my right arm. Zero feeling from the shoulder down.

That frigging hornet hit me HARD. A little bit of anaphalactic shock, and for a minute, more than a slight closing up of my throat.

(Near) nausea, and then hanging in there with the paralyzing effects of the venom, now from the shoulder down to the tips of my fingers.

No more class of Angla (English), but now I'm teaching cusswords.

About ten minutes later, Dio the truck driver went into the greatest litany of humor I have ever experienced.

In place of the word You, the truck driver says "Shoo." Also, when he laughs (in South American style) Dio goes ke-ke-ke-ke.

Ke-ke-ke-ke-chay Shoo-Ke-KEE-Ke, Jay ShOOO!

I could tell the trucker was amused by the way he laughed and yelled "Jay Shoo!"

("Hey You!" in his trucker-talk.)

Dio continued to beat on my (good) left shoulder and laugh at me.

"Shoo!" (You!) He screamed at me. The trucker laughed heartily for a minute while pointing at me with his leathery hand.

"Shoo! (You!) Shoo (You!) Ow Ow Sonny Peach!"

Ow Sonny Peach!

"Oh Mi Gotti Gotti Sonny peach. Ow Sonny Peach! Mutti fuki, mutti fuki, ow gotti dammi, sonny peach."

The trucker pointed at me. He laughed that hearty trucker laugh.

"Shoe (you)! Ja Ja!"

Ow sony peach!

He pointed at me again, and went into another rant featuring *his* version of *me* cussing: fuk, mutti fuki, hertz, shat, mutti fuki, mutti dammi. Gotti dammi, shat, ow Ki, Ki, Ki, Ki, Ki.....SHOO!

Shoo Ki Ki, Ki, Ki, Ki fuk, fuki, fuk sheet, gotti dammi, gotti dammi, EEEE hertz, hertz, hertz!

Hertz, fuk, ow, sheet, wo, gotti dammi sheet, fuki, fuki, ow, oww, ow gotti dammi sheet, ow sonny peach, Ow Sonny Peach!

Then the trucker laughed, pointed to me, and yelled: "Shoo! (You!)"

So, I shook his hand (with my left hand). We laughed for many miles.

While we were laughing and talking, Dio the trucker took me right into the Microcentro (Downtown) of Buenos Aires.

(This is very illegal and quite a risk for big rig drivers who might get a ticket from cops who don't "know" or haven't been paid to "know" the trucking company.)

Dio took me down by Retiro Station, and then parked in front of Excellent English USA.

I wanted him to do a diesel blast on the horn. He wisely refused.

A bunch of teachers and students were milling around the front door of the school.

Dio seemed amazed because I told the truth. He was astonished to see the school sign, the students and teachers.

I checked the straps on my bag of books, opened the door and sort of hopped out, hoping to put a foot on the second step.

What a big mistake.

If you don't learn how to *look* when you put your foot on the step to climb out of that big rig truck, it's a long drop to the ground.

Wham. Gravity is a bitch.

The staff and students who truly love Excellent English USA have never seen me show up for class by way of big truck.

So I said: "Good Morning" and fell out of the truck.

Also, I am covered in sweat and dirt.

I was dying of thirst.

I had a can of Coca-Cola in my book bag. (The one I bought at the truck stop on the Pan-Americana.)

In front of all my teachers and many students, I took the can out, started to pop the top, and in true Charlie Chaplin style, the can under great pressure blew a geyser of warm Coca-Cola straight into my face and up my nose.

The pause that refreshes.

Everybody started laughing, then cheering in a soccer (football) chant: "Vamos Charley. Vamos Vamos Charley."

Now covered in dirt, sweat and Coca Cola, it's time to go to school and teach.

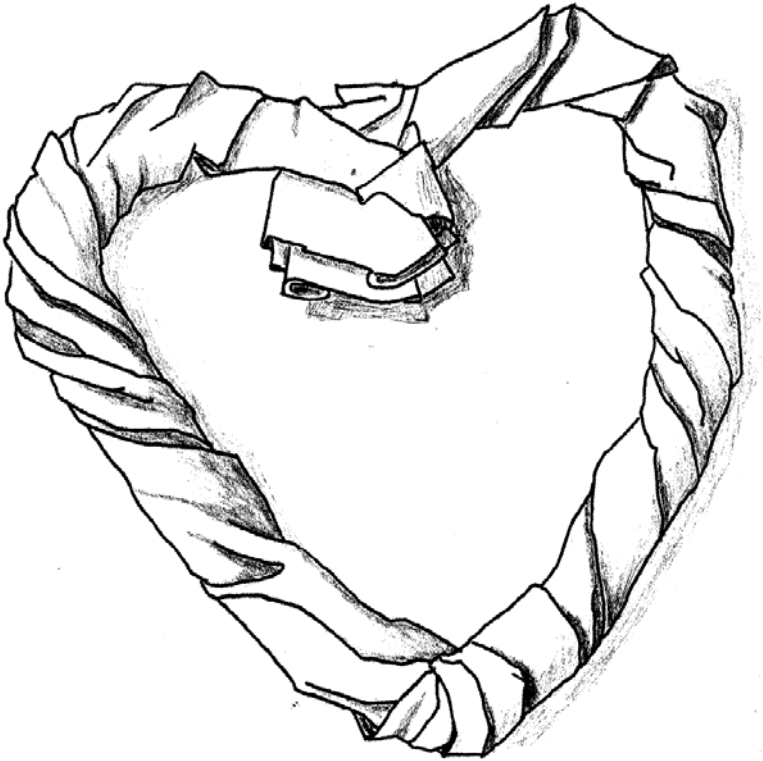
Everybody in Argentina loves a "show."

My teachers and students have one thing in common:

They can say they saw the show when the Director of the School of English arrived in fine style, and blasted a Coke into his own face.

(They gave me a hard time for a year.)

Ow, Sonny Peach!



HE (In the Shape of a Heart)

It is August and the street is hot as a parrilla (big grill) in downtown Miami.

The sun beats down on the asphalt streets of the Orange Bowl district like some kind of devil swinging a large hot sledge hammer.

The roads are so hot they are SOFT.

A guy that looks like Che Guerva has big speakers in the back of his Camero blasting out an AC / DC song.

"Highway to Hell"

Angus Young can really tear up that guitar.

The newest movie is called ET.

It is about a pale thing from outer space with bright blue eyes, a big head and scrawny body.

From what people have told me, a kid puts the ET in the basket in front of the handlebars of his bike, and then they fly past the moon.

Women and kids go twice. Men say this movie is dumb, and it will be quickly forgotten.

In Miami, it rains those torrential tropical rains almost every afternoon.

When the angry sky dumps upside-down swimming pools of tropical torrential rains, there are afternoons that feature

long lines of screaming, giggling Haitian, Cuban, and other American kids in the middle of innertubes riding (urban) rapids down the sides of the streets. Great fun. Imagine.

I am really stuck in Miami. This is the best way to know Miami. (Or maybe not.)

You decide.

Charley Karnes had a small fake leather American Tourister saggy piece of luggage that looked like a sawed-off duffel bag. I was working two jobs and almost homeless, begging any landlord to let me work and pay outlandish money for a safe place LOL to live.

The landlords were determined (they teach this at Landlord School) to take everything I owned until they realized there's nothing left to steal.

It's big city, South Florida. It's the normal noises in Miami.

SOOOOO, I went to church.

Driving a stolen, slightly repainted cop car (I didn't steal it) with a stolen plate, no registration, and no insurance (but I did have a valid drivers license, not Florida).

It's 1983. The radio on the (former) cop car is blasting My Sharona on a Sunday morning, and I was living on raw English Muffins with grape jelly from little squeeze packets the elderly waitress gave me at the IHOP on the Palmetto Expressway.

I went to church.

This was a very evangelistic church. They were so into serving the Lord, they didn't have a church. (That's faith!)

Services are held in the large conference room of a run-down office building.

This congregation is very high on Jesus and God, but low on budget. They love to sing one of my favorite songs: "This Is The Day."

Here's a church with one rule. If you don't put the palms of both hands horizontal to the ceiling every few minutes, usually in time with everybody else, they will HELP to put your hands that way.

These people love the idea of lots of folks with hands held as close as possible to the ceiling to worship God and Jesus. (A Speed Stick sure wouldn't hurt.) The place was designed for Hobbits and sardines.

At the end of the Sunday service, a great man who will be forever known as John the Roofer asked for a host of angels to help him with a large roofing project.

Pay is \$100 a day, a fortune in 1983, to help John the Roofer with a project in Boca Raton.....

Monday morning at dawn, hammer in hand, I stood at a 15-degree angle on a roof, busily pulling brown ceramic tiles, rotten wood, and nails off the second story of a sheer incline.

The fun never ends.

About two hours into the job, we learned the chimney was full of bees which swarmed cloudlike on the way out.

Those bees taught many of us how to jump off a roof!

I prefer the aluminum ladder.

I can do that slide thing where the feet never touch the rungs on the way down.

By noon, our believers had stripped the rotten tar paper off and fixed all the holes in the roof. For obvious reasons, you have to repair, re-paper, and re-shingle a roof before it rains (duh).

We hauled large, heavy rolls of new tar paper up and rolled them out.

The John the Roofer roofing crew (we called ourselves) followed with tar shingles in long lines nailed in straight as an arrow.

Storm clouds filled the sky and blotted out the sun.

Now it's a race to get the all the shingles nailed down before the rain soaks (ruins) the new tar paper, the wood that is the support of the house and soaks through to drench and eventually mildew everything from roof to basement.

This time, we won the race. We finished roofing the entire roof (And the roof of the garage) minutes before the skies over Miami opened up with a torrential downpour, complete with (dangerously close) lightning and deafening thunder.

We GOT the JOB DONE. With some congratulations, and the obligatory John the Roofer group prayer of thanks. We laughed at the rain (in the rain) and strapped the ladders to the top of the van.

Everybody packed into somebody's Chevy Vega and the 1979 Chevy Van of John the Roofer, who promised to take us out to dinner.

He had just paid everybody for the day, so we were *really* hoping dinner would be free and great.

John the Roofer took us to the Wendys in Hialeah.

The sky had not rained One Drop in Hialeah.

The sun continued to blaze, and the streets were absolutely broiling in the heat.

Everyone on the crew was tired, beat up, and some of us were bee-stung. We are also notably covered with dirt, sweat, exhaustion, and Miami late-afternoon stinking.

With some reeking.

Hands are washed, courtesy of the rest room and hard-working paper towel dispenser at the restaurant.

Now our motley roofing crew of twelve was plenty hungry and "Really *into* some Wendys."

We had already pushed four tables together, and instructed a guy who looked like the Cuban version of Gomer Pyle to guard them.

As the roofer crew stood in line, I turned 180 degrees and looked through the front window.

A man about 30 years old (you can't make this up) walked straight through the middle of Biscayne Boulevard "Frogger"-type traffic and through the MIDDLE of the front of the Wendys rock garden.

It's so hot in South Miami, the front lawn of the Wendys is a rock garden. (It's the only kind of garden you don't have to water.)

This man is walking across the rocks wearing a bedsheet and pair of flip-flops. The strap on one of his flip-flops is broken, and it flails around behind his left foot as he walks.

In Southern Florida, sandals and flip-flops are accepted as shoes, so it is OK to walk into a fast-food restaurant wearing flip-flops. (Or at least one working flip-flop.)

This man is carrying nothing. He has nothing. He is wearing a whiter-than-white bedsheet that is not cut from any particular pattern. The sheet seems to flow around him.

No pants. No shirt. Just bedsheet.

And nobody cares. (This is a Wendys in South Miami.)

Sooo, the mysterious man in white walked up to the counter and asked to speak to the Manager.

The Assistant Manager arrived, and the man in the bedsheet (and flip-flops) said in a strong, compassionate voice:

"Mr. Manager, Thank You."

"Will you please donate one (trip to the) salad bar for me In the name of God and Jesus Christ?"

After looking at HIM for a **very** long five seconds, the rotund Assistant Manager stepped away and went to another, even more rotund Manager who walked up and said loudly:

"NO!"

The man in white stood like a statue and did not move. Nobody moved.

Until John the Roofer jumped from his chair with a Michael Jordan-like lightning quick first step and confronted the Manager before he could turn away from the counter.

John smiled and said: "I'm paying for his salad bar."

About five minutes later (HE) in the white robe sat in the middle at a our super-table, eerily reminiscent of a painting by Loeonardo Da Vinci.

We are a dirty crew, and we could all use a Tic Tac or two. We are covered head to toe in dirt and clay from the roof tiles and reeking of sweat.

We are a gnarly crew of twelve (no kidding; I counted).

The August HVAC system of the Wendy's was working hard, if you know what I mean.

We weren't stinking. In Southern terms, We were STANKING.

Nobody was surprised when the rest of the customers got up and walked out in unison.

One lady was pointing to her nose and shouting: "Why the nerve!" This is Miami. Pronounced My-Amma.

Everybody was surprised when HE sat down with us, smelled us, smiled, and stayed.

The Smiling Man (we decided to call him HIM) had every chance to sit somewhere else, or even go outside.

But HE sat with us.

HE always answers the Question: "What is your name?" with: "That's not important, what is yours?" and a big smile, until you realize HE refuses to answer the question.

When asked what it is like to not have anything at all (because HE really had nothing more than what he was wearing), HE smiled and said slowly: "And I need those things, why?"

And: "Is that *all* you ask?"

John the Roofer convinced HIM to go with us back to John's somewhat modest and broken-down house.

By way of a packed Chevy van. We try to give HIM room, but it's a tight fit. We are now nine. With HIM we are ten, in a van with windows that only tilt open about an inch and a half.

Many of the roofers did exactly what happens to hard-working men after a big meal.

While the cheese-cutters laughed, the rest of us begged for mercy.

HE smiled.

And, we're still packed in a van with windows that still only tilt open about an inch and a half.

At John the Roofer's place HE insisted on sleeping in a cramped place that was an attic crawl space.

HE slept in a nasty attic while surrounded by open foam insulation which sticks to you like cotton candy with fiberglass splinters.

The floor was filthy, with wiring, and nails point up, very dusty, insanely hot, and far from the fans downstairs.

HE accepted a sheet, but folded up his own robe to make a pillow.

In Miami, home security is a must.

If you don't have keys for both locks and the deadbolt, it's IMPOSSIBLE to get in OR out of a house, much less the fenced-in yard.

John the Roofer has three mean, vicious, ornery attack dogs that roam the yard 60 seconds of every minute for 60 minutes 24/7. A Pit Bull, an old Rot mix and a Doberman mix. They are so mean, they bite each other.

Tropical birds chirp like a symphony orchestra at sunrise in the morning.

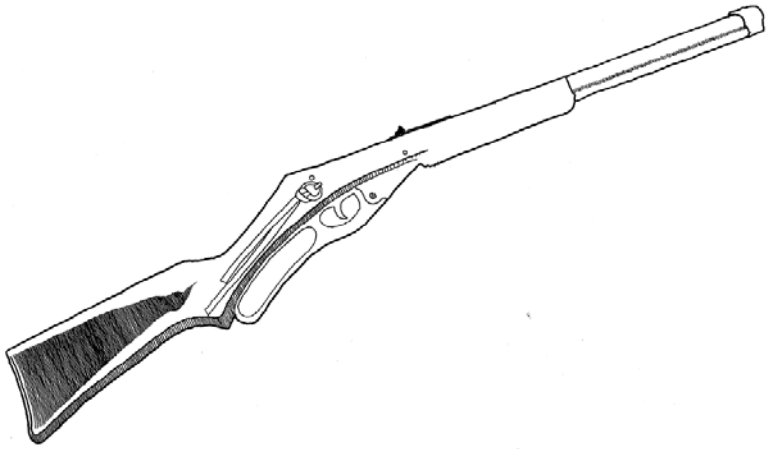
Just before the beautiful, fragrant, Miami dawn, John the Roofer climbed the stairs to the attic.

John climbed the creaky stairs carrying a horizontal tray with two cups of coffee, a carton of milk, and some sugar packets. It is challenging to balance all that on a tray. John wanted to wake HIM up and offer HIM the coffee, some breakfast, some work, and perhaps some clothes.

HE was Gone.

HE left the bed sheet rolled up.

In the shape of a heart.



Billy and the BB Gun

(Note: * indicates a fictional name.)

Jeremiah (Jerry) King* is everybody's go-to Man.

And, the main word is..... Man.

Jeremiah is not white, or black. He is a self-proclaimed "cousin of a cousin" and he has a whole "salt and pepper" family tree to prove it.

If you buy him a PBR, Jerry will tell you all about it.

Jerry is a plumber, a mechanic, a skilled carpenter and house framer, an old school electrician (with his own tools) and a smiling, shining star of a person.

Jerry is a natural-born genius when it comes to fixing absolutely anything.

His motto is: "If I can't fix it, it ain't broke."

He is a notably tall, wiry man. Jerry stands about six foot four, only 230 pounds, all muscle. Strong and tough in a good way. Just don't make him mad.

Jerry has a smile and sparkling eyes that capture you at first sight. He has a good heart. His beard is, as Jerry Garcia might say, a touch of gray, and extremely well-kept.

He often speaks with pauses as if channeling Abe Linclon.

Jerry can fix a long line of anything!

From a Ford truck engine to the circuit board on a home AC relay, to a timing belt on a Honda Civic, and then a bad farm septic tank leaky stinky (buried) PVC plumbing,

Followed by a well that ran dry and the pump burned up, and somebody's rotted roof falling in (while it's raining).

That's just the short list of an easy day for Jerry.

If there is a person anywhere, in need, Jeremiah (Jerry) King will *already have* the tools in the truck. He will kiss his wife, tap the kids on the forehead, skip dinner, jump in the truck, and make things right.

For the price of a handshake.

He is a real-life hometown hero.

(But there is no town because everybody lives way, way out in the country.)

Whataguy.

Jerry drives a Ford truck and rides a Harley on the weekends, with many friends who ride big bikes.

Jerry sings in the church choir with a notable booming baritone voice.

At times, as invited, Jerry King steps forward to the podium and adds his own "message" to the sermon.

Everybody loves to hear his insights.

Jerry is married to Megan and they have four kids, ranging in age from 7 to 17. Jerry is tough on his oldest son. In a right way.

One cold rainy day in January, Jerry said he felt terrible, and could not go to work. Couldn't even get out of the bed.

Two days later, Mr. Jerry King was diagnosed: Pancreatic Cancer.

After the initial shock, both Church and community pulled together and "pooled" together for the biggest fundraiser ever.

Imagine a small army of Rednecks with great hearts. In the cafeteria - at the church.

In the words of many benefit auctioneers, this was a great effort at a heartfelt ABC auction.

ABC auction means:

People clear out their Attics, Basements and Closets, and truck it to the site. (Heavy on the Christmas decorations, LOL.)

Before the event, the tension in the air is so thick, you can cut it with a butter knife.

About the fundraiser: I'm working with another great auctioneer, named Matt.*

He is a talented auctioneer. He works with a non-profit that mentors at-risk kids.

Matt and I get along like peanut butter and jelly.

We sometimes switch between calling bids and catching bids, during the sale. It's sort of like jugglers throwing the pins to each other. The crowd loves it.

At one point, five lovely ladies brought from the kitchen big baskets of hot apple with cinnamon turnovers, individually wrapped and streaming the most alluring smell in the world.

Wujabid, wujagive wujago!! Now now, wujabid, now wujagive, wujago hey!

We sold the hot apple cinnamon turnovers in Dutch style, so that the winning buyer can get as many as they want at the highest selling price.

Until they are all sold.

And the hot apple cinnamon turnovers went faster than the wonderful ladies could hand them out.

In the truly painful realistic dichotomy of life, it's unfortunate but true:

Many times, the exact same people who donate things to the auction, don't have the bucks to buy things that other people have donated to the auction!

The lunchroom / auditorium is packed. It's the middle of January. All the windows are fogged up.

We sold a total of 54 items / lots. We really did not get the numbers we wanted. Best sale was a 12-foot bass boat for less than \$200. (Outboard motor included.)

Jerry's wife (Megan) was tearful.

Matt and I were ready to wrap things up.

Then a father walked up to me with a seven-year-old boy hugging his BB gun.

The father looked at me *straight* in the *eye* for exactly two seconds, didn't say a word, then dropped to one knee and stared face-to-face at the kid.

"Now, son, you tell him, you tell him what you said to me."

"Daddy, I, You tell 'em."

And the little boy turned and ran. He disappeared into the crowd.

I pulled my microphone off the clip on the stand and handed it to the father.

He looks like a Deputy Sheriff in blue jeans and a plaid shirt. (Because, that's what he is, and that's what he's wearing.)

"Hi, I'm Jeff Dylan*. You already know me. That's my boy Billy."

He cleared his throat, and took off his John Deere baseball cap.

"Truth is, Billy told me that he wants to help Jerry, and he loves Jerry and he's always called Jerry Uncle Jerry."

Pin drop silence. (The deputy takes a deep breath.)

"My boy told me last night he wants to put in (the auction) the very most best prize thing he has, and that's his BB gun right here....."

"And I told him that when they sell it, he can't have it n'more. And he said, he said, ya'll, that's OK.

But I tell you, Billy looooooves his BB gun, and I think it's a great thing that he wants to you, know, help...here, take it."

Jeff handed the microphone back to me, and he handed the BB gun to Matt.

At exactly the same time, Matt and I both made the Hundred bux signal to each other.

Agreed, and we're not going to settle for less than \$100, and we both laughed at each other at the same time.

This is a used BB gun.

I said: "I got it."

Matt said: "I got it."

And in the world of auctioneering, first one in, wins.

Sooo, I kicked the auction into gear.

"Now on the BB gun!

"It's a beautiful Daisy BB gun, donated by Billy Dylan. He's back there next to the Cheerwine vending machine, hugging his Uncle Jerry. This is a great Daisy BB gun." (Deep Charley breath.)

"An-you-can-have-it-if-you-want-it-but-you-gotta-jump-on-it-now-25-wujabid-hey-bid-25-now-fiddy, now fiddy-hey-75-wujago-75-now-yeah-a hunner-wujabid-a hunner-wujagive-a hunner-thank-you-now go....."

And Matt picked up the chant like a champion. He has more of a Country-Western style.

"Now-a-hunner-an-a quarter, hunner-an-a-quarter, hunner-an-a-haff? Now-now-hey-hunner an-a-haff? Yeah! Now-one-seddy-five-- seddy-five-ana-two-hunner? Two hunner! Ana-two-and-a-quarter-now, here we go, now-fiddy now-fiddy....."

The BB gun sold for a whopping \$275.

(To everybody's surprise, the pleading "Sell It Again" lecture that I did at the beginning of the event made a difference.)

The buyer (a nice lady, and a favorite teacher at the local High School) took a notably long half a minute to stand up on her chair.

She yelled in a powerful tone, at the top of her lungs:

"Sell it again!!!!"

And the roar from the crowd was so loud, I thought the roof of the church was going to come off.

Matt and I sold Billy's BB gun again, this time for \$275 to a big mean motorcycle man named Trouble.

He looked like a cousin of Sasquach with a haircut from a dull chain saw.

When Trouble stood up and smiled with his huge arms outstretched, the church cafeteria went pin-drop silent for about three loooooong seconds.

He grunted and pointed straight at me with a huge hand.

"Sell it again!!"

And the place went absolutely wild. All of the Bikers, all of the volunteer firefighters, all of the church choir, and the ladies serving up the chili dogs are ALL doing high fives and hugging.

The teenagers outside came in to see what the noise was all about!

They caught the aura (wave, onda) and these young men and young ladies fired up the crowd even more.

We sold that same rusty BB gun three more times.

Jerry and his wife Megan hugged each other and jumped up and down with tears on their cheeks.

The last buyer (a Firefighter) grabbed the BB gun from me, pushed through the crowd and gave the BB gun to little Billy, who screamed with joy.

In seconds, they put Billy on the shoulders of Trouble.

The little boy held the BB gun in both hands, arms stretched straight upwards over his head as he rode on the giant shoulders of Trouble, who let out a huge laugh.

The roar of the crowd sounded like thunder.

Billy Dylan was then passed from shoulder to shoulder.

Seven years old, and now ten feet tall.

Billy rode on the shoulders of Bikers, Firefighters, Farmers, the farmer that donated the chili, a lady who runs a fitness center, and some really awesome men and ladies in the Church choir.

The cafeteria got so hot, after two laps around the place, the Choir people decided to lower the child to the ground.

Only to open the double doors, and take this joyful Billy on-the-shoulders parade straight outside. (In the middle of Winter!)

Jerry laughed with his booming one-of-a-kind laugh.

Whataguy.

If you look up into the sky tonight, there is a new star way up there.

Jeremiah King.

Shining brightly.