

Long Ago Sundays

Memories #1

by S.K. Hamilton

On a cold, starry winter night, three days before Christmas, two, ten-year-old girl friends sat on a curb on Washington Avenue, waiting, wishing, and hoping for snow.

The full moon hovered in a cloudless sky, making it so clear you could see every twinkling star. Moonlight beamed onto the white blanket of snow that covered the ground the day before, bouncing slivers of silver. Soon snow clouds rolled in and hid the moon and stars. Then the snow came. Light at first, then heavier, until the flakes floated down like tiny balls of cotton all around us.

Mary Ann and I sat touching shoulders. In silent wonder, we watched the usual busy Washington Ave, now deserted. No more counting cars as they whizzed by. The game we played often was over. Now only stillness filled the night. No barking dogs. No honking horns. No laughter from the neighborhood gang. Only eerie silence.

Our eyes mirrored gem and jewel tone colors that glistened and bounced off places where Christmas lights reflected.

Lights from outside and inside neighborhood houses cast magical reflections. Every twig in every tree, on every bush glistened. Shadows twisted, unyielding from objects in their path.

Ann's house, across the avenue from my grandparents two story brick house, had been our secret place to sit on the curb after dark. We pretended it was a magic spot where no one could see us.

Now and then, the moon came shining through the snow clouds like new money. Then it was gone again. Soon snowfall increased, and so did the bitter cold. An icy chill crept into our snow suites and before long we could barely see across the wide avenue.

It occurs to me now, years after, that the roads in those times were wider and spaces between houses, significantly greater. Is it because I was smaller? Or was it because growing cities and towns played a part in shrinking the wonderful countryside.

The play day had been active but now it ended. We would tuck away our memories into a secret hiding place in our hearts to recall at another time, another place, another long ago Sunday.

We were called home, each to our own, and although reluctant to end this momentous magic night, we hurried to our warm and comfortable homes. I exchanged cold wet clothes for a warm, flannel nightgown then settled down in front of the fire that Grandpa was tending. Of course, dear Grandma Gary soon served hot chocolate with lots of marshmallows. Those happy days, those unforgettable days, those simple but meaningful days, were ours to keep and cherish for all time.

That specific night, we later learned, was recorded to be the deepest snowfall in Wheeling's history. Call it a blizzard, a severe winter storm, or whatever you wish but for two little ten-year-old best girl friends it was a magical, breathtaking winter wonderland, never to be forgotten.

Next, for a hard lesson well learned, journey into... Long Ago Sundays. My Forsaken Silver Cup #3. Grandma's can teach valuable lessons through love, not fear.

THE END

Long Ago Sundays #1

Remember When We Almost Didn't Make It?

By: S.K. Hamilton

My dear friend,

Do you remember the time we almost didn't make it? Yesterday, I thought about our famous escapades in the good ol' days when we owned the world. Every day was a new beginning for us. Those were the wonderful, happy years, the times memories were built on. I remember it well.

We were ten-years-old and best girlfriends. Days of spring and summer, autumn and winter became years, then the awful day when we were parted. Mom and Daddy moved to a state full of asphalt, speed traps and radar. How I missed our beautiful West Virginia countryside. It was awful! Being separated broke our hearts. How we missed each other. We wrote letters but it wasn't the same. We couldn't giggle and trade wild flowers and plan escapades in a letter.

I journey back many times to those wonderful days, and you're always there waiting for me.

Our parents were good to us. I was a bit dubious of your father's sternness. He was a quiet man and I respected him. I don't think I ever told you that. How well I remember your Mom's gentle ways. No one in the whole world could make a spice cake with brown sugar icing like she could. I often wonder if she thought I was rude when I ask for seconds. And our grandparents-- how they loved us. Our families are gone now, but I still see them in my minds eye and feel them in my heart, and I know you do also.

We were full of life and orneriness. Summer vacation from school and weekends lead us

rushing headlong into trouble. Of course, it was not our fault. Trouble found us. You always convinced me that we were innocent.

I remember how we loved springtime in the country, when the brown winter grass turned green overnight, or so it seemed. Trees blossomed and bloomed in all their glory. Rainbow colors decked the hillsides and valleys and the roadside where our journey took place.

Remember when we tried to paint the landscape with our oil paints? Our interpretation was not bad for ten year-olds. You always said mine was best and I said yours was best. We went back and forth complementing each other.

Then that gorgeous spring day when we almost didn't make it. Remember?

That notable Sunday took a serious turn for the worse. If I remember correctly, six of us ranging from ten to twelve years got together for an adventure.

It started Sunday morning, on bicycles, our main mode of transportation. We began our long up and downhill journey, through the woods and over the hills on our way to Birtha May's grandmother's.

Hours later, when the afternoon began to wane, we began to tire, and we had no idea how much farther it was to Grandma Bessie's house. But time to ten-year-olds was never a factor.

We stopped along the way to gather violets and other wild flowers. I remember well, the most significant discovery that day was the rare yellow violet patch. You made me promise not to tell its location; it was our secret and I never told. Did you?

Sally and Jonnie, your cousins, were first to give up and turn back. What cowards they were, you said, and I agreed. But they actually turned out to be the smart ones.

I remember as clearly as if it were yesterday, when blonde, curly-headed, Billy Neidert said, "How much farther is it to your grandmother's, Birtha May?"

"Not much farther. We're almost there."

So, on we went. Billy held out for another thirty minutes and then after telling us how dumb he thought we were, he bid us farewell and headed for home. Another coward in the group, I said, and you agreed.

Now, the three of us, Bertha Ann, you and me proceeded with determination, climbing higher and higher. We huffed and puffed until we began to wear out. Birtha May, assured us every time we rounded a bend in the road that we were almost there.

“It’s just over this hill”, she would say. “Just over that hill I’m sure.” She said, pointing to one hill after another. To this day, I don’t believe she knew where she was.

We continued our journey with perseverance and hope in our hearts, stopping only for Birtha May to rest. You and I were tired but she looked exhausted, drained and her coloring was gone. Did we discuss the idea of turning back? I seem to remember we did. However, there was something about being past the point of no return.

Fear was beginning to take root and we realized the day was going fast. The sun was inching its way to the mountaintop, the air chilled, and the sounds of nature became silent. All the buttercups along the roadside folded their petals for the day. An eerie feeling crept around every curve in the road. Then—Birtha May shouted in pure fright.

“I don’t know how much farther it is. I don’t remember. But I think we’re on the right road.”

“You mean you’re not *sure* we’re on the right road?” She began to cry and looked strange, sort of bloodless. She had always been pale but now she was white, snow white, and her breath came in short gasps. Can you call to mind the way we looked at each other when she told us for the first time that she had a heart condition.

“A heart condition! What heart condition?” you asked.

“I don’t know what it’s called. It just starts beating real fast and then skips around and...”

Tears streamed down her face leaving brownish streaks. You and I tried our best to comfort her.

We were so afraid she was going to die.

We rested for what seemed like hours, until Birtha May felt strong enough to continue. Still we had no idea how far we were from her grandmother's or even if we'd past it. We took turns walking her bike uphill for her. Not one automobile came by to save us that day. Soon the events turned from scary to terrifying. I noticed that Bertha Ann's nose began to trickle a small stream of red. It was blood. I'll never forget that horrified feeling. I know you haven't forgotten either. She cried. All three of us cried. You convinced us we should go on. It was too late to turn back. You were right.

God journeyed with us that day. All at once Birtha May blurted, "This looks familiar." We looked at each other, and I know our thoughts were the same. At last, maybe she knows where we are. By then, the sun was touching the mountaintop and as we rounded a bend in the road, what to our eyes appeared, but Grandmother Bessie's farmhouse. Glory Be! We rejoiced. Relief was in sight and not a minute too soon for Birtha May.

We reached the house just before she collapsed. Grandma Bessie put her to bed, under covers, with cold water rags placed on her forehead and wrists, administered some sort of medicine and prayed over her right in front of us. Our friend looked so white and so sick. We were frightened out of our wits, thinking she might die because of our frivolous adventure. We blamed ourselves. You said not to worry and I wondered how you knew why we shouldn't.

After tending to her granddaughter, Grandmother Bessie, turned to us, her eyebrows meeting in the middle, her little gray bun pinned at the base of her neck and that voice that could scare the devil himself said, "Would you girls like a glass of lemonade?" Birtha May's grandma Bessie, was so short she could barely reach the kitchen cupboards, but there was fire in her, no denying that.

“Yes, Ma’am,” was all we could get out. The lecture that followed was horrifying. Remember how we needed to cry but held it back? We sat on the edge of our seats afraid to move one muscle. She told us all about Birtha May’s illness, how she was never supposed to get too tired and how we should never have attempted this journey. “I hope you girls realize that Birtha May could be in gra-a-a-a-ve, (she strung the grave way out making the word sort of vibrate,) danger from this foolishness,” she had said.

“But...but...we didn’t kn...”

“Don’t interrupt me, Sylvia Kaye Gary.” How Aunt Bessie knew our names, I’ll never know.

“Yes ma’am.” I said.

Her lecture left us petrified. I don’t think she ever considered that we didn’t know Birtha May’s condition and that we might have been blameless.

Punishment was undoubtedly ahead of us but we decided it could be no worse than learning about our good friend and realizing what *could* have happened. We apologized and Grandmother Bessie seemed to forgive us. She called my grandpa Gary to come for us and the long wait that followed was excruciating. Especially for me, since it was my grandpa she called.

It’s unbelievable, Ann, how Birtha May survived this incident and in later years died from the same heart condition that plagued her as a youngster. I’m sure if we had realized the extent of her problem, we would not have ventured into such a dangerous situation. But God was with us that day.

It was after dark when we arrived home. Thank heavens Grandpa had a truck to carry our bicycles. Once more, a hardy thank you was due grandpa Gary for coming for us. But were we too scared to thank him? I don’t recall.”

Next came our punishment--one whole week confined to our homes. We couldn’t even talk to each other on the phone. How horrible that was. We expected punishment but how unjust was

this? Finally, the week ended and another adventure, and another, and another reared its ugly head in our path and dared us to take it. Of course...we did. But...if you remember, we were always careful to see that Birtha May took it easy when she was with us.

My dearest friend, sometimes I think we are strung together by memories. Let me hear from you. Don't let me come unstrung.

Take care of yourself, dear one, until we meet again.

Your 'forever' friend,

Sylvia Kaye

Long Ago Sundays #2, Memories of childhood days will bring back times of your very own memories.

THE END

Long Ago Sundays
My Forsaken Silver Cup #3
by S. K. Hamilton

The great two-story brick house on Washington Avenue in Wheeling, WV depicted the charm of houses built in the 1920's. It was my favorite place to spend time. I viewed it as my sanctuary, my home away from home, my retreat. I loved that old house. More important, I loved the people in it. You could find me at Grandma and Grandpa's house most any time.

Across the Avenue from my Grandparents lived my best friend, Mary Ann. We were inseparable. Two peas in a pod, Daddy used to say.

The neighborhood was flooded with kids our age. One exception—the elder Jerry Bercket. Jerry was our leader to Wetzel's Cave in "Long Ago Sundays #4." He was thirteen and three quarters, so he said, and according to our parents, too old and too wild to associate with.

He wiggled his way into our activities at times but only because we allowed him the privilege, we thought. Contrary to our parent's belief he did not appear dangerous to us. He seemed to know more than we did and that was a good thing.

Grandpa and Grandma's home was comfortable and friendly. Everyone who entered felt welcome. We could play hide and seek for hours in this house without being yelled at and never hide in the same place twice. The upstairs at some point in time was turned into an apartment for Mother and Daddy. We lived there while Daddy and Grandpa built our home in Morningside. They were builders and built many sub-divisions around wheeling. After moving into our new home, the upstairs of Grandpa's was vacant, hence, rendering the entire apartment as a playhouse for Mary Ann and I.

This is the place we learned to use Grandma's treadle Singer sewing machine to make clothes for our Sonya Heni ice skating dolls. The poor old sewing machine was put to a rigorous durability test and came out with flying colors. A real proof of quality. I'm not so sure the sewing machine's today would hold up under the same stress. Grandma was forever changing broken needles until one day she purchased needles by the dozens and taught us to change them ourselves.

She laughed and said, "Now, my Dearie's, change those needles yourself." From that point on, fewer needles were broken. Funny how Grandma's can be so clever.

We learned to sew and design clothes for our dolls which served us well in later years. The encouragement and training from Grandma proved invaluable.

Washington Avenue neighborhood was always brimming over with excitement. Never a dull moment for "The Restless Rascals," the title we somehow acquired. Something interesting was happening all the time. It was like being in the center of a gigantic circus or carnival. We were the stars. To top it off, dear Grandma Gary made each day special for us with her home baked pies and cakes and cookies made especially for us. As a rule the stolen fruit from the neighbors fruit trees were the main ingredient for the home baked sweets. If you think we "Rascals" had a hand in fruit coping, well...I'm not telling. Grandma pretended not to wonder where the apples, peaches, cherries, plums and pears came from but we all knew...she knew. "Pies will be ready soon, Dearie," she'd say, as she sat them on the wide window sill to cool. In case you don't know it stolen fruit makes better pies. That's another story.

Saturday was spent playing outdoors. Sunday morning Grandpa, Grandma and I attended church sporting all our dress up clothes. We took part in "The Lords Supper." I was allowed to participate. The grape juice was my favorite part. It tasted so good, but there was so little of it. I wondered why they didn't pass around a bigger glass. I tried in vain to get Grandpa and

Grandma to give me theirs. Next time at the grocery store Grandma bought a big bottle of grape juice, but somehow, it just wasn't the same. Proof that more is not always better.

After church I changed into play clothes and ate lunch. Good ole` ham sandwiches on toast with ice cream sodas made with vanilla ice cream and cream soda pop. Grandma's specialty was better than any soda jerk in all of Wheeling could make them.

Everyone met outside after lunch and we whiled away the afternoon playing softball, hopscotch and mother may I.

It was soon time for our usual afternoon ice cream trip to the store in Claytor across the railroad track. I decided it would be nice if I treated each of my friends to an ice cream cone of their choice. A double dip cost five cents and a triple dip cost ten cents. You can guess what their choice was.

Grandma's dining room was large. I mean huge. The table sat ten people comfortably and the buffet was against the wall. It was a matching set and she kept the table highly polished so that it reflected the chandelier above. In the middle of the buffet sat a large silver tray with a coffee server and matching cream and sugar bowl. The silver sugar bowl was used for my ice cream money and although it was not always full it was never empty. I remember being fascinated with the way it shined. I could see the reflection of my face in the coffee server and I was captivated and baffled simultaneously at the way my features were distorted. I could not understand why I looked so silly. At first glance I thought for sure something was terribly wrong with me. My face was so swollen and out of shape. Then I discover that I looked pretty-good in the mirror in Grandma's bedroom. I chose at that point to believe the image of my face in the coffee server was not the right one.

For the first time in a long time my silver cup was lower than I needed it to be. Too low to treat my friends to the ice cream I promised them. I do not remember where Grandpa and

Grandma were at the time, Grandma probably working in her flower garden and Grandpa working on his Buick. Frantic, because I did not want to back down on my word, I found Grandma's pocket book and helped myself to all the change she had. With that and what was in my silver cup I had enough. Over the railroad track to McFaddens drug store in Claytor we went. I fulfilled my promise and knew I'd done a good thing.

The next day or two went by without incident. It was on a Wednesday after school that we all decided it was time for ice cream. Running into the house, the screen door slamming behind me, I hurried into the dining room and over to the buffet. My silver cup was empty! There must be some mistake, I thought. Grandma was sitting in the living room in her favorite chair next to Grandpa's when I called out to her.

"Grandma? Grandma!" Why don't I have any ice cream money in my cup?" She answered,

"Come here Sylvia." I obeyed. I always obeyed my Grandma. She had a way about her.

"Sit down and I'll tell you." I knew immediately something was wrong when she called me Sylvia instead of Dearie. I sat down on the footstool in front of her. She kept knitting without looking at me.

"Did you take money out of my pocketbook?"

"Yes." I said. "There wasn't enough in my cup." She was silent for a long moment then touched her hand to my face in a loving gesture.

"Sylvia, what you did is the same as stealing You acted like a thief, a robber and I am very disappointed in you. Never, never take anything that does not belong to you regardless of how much you think you need it." With that I burst out crying, declaring that I was sorry and would never do it again. The only thing in the world I never wanted to do was to let my Grandma down. She wrapped her arms around me and held me for a long time.

My silver cup remained empty for what seemed like a long time. I missed the trips to the store with my friends for ice cream. Sometimes I checked two or three times a day hoping to find it full. Finally one day my hope came true. No words were ever spoken and the incident was never mentioned again but I never forgot this valuable lesson. I thank God many times for my grandmother's lessons. It will be remembered and appreciated for a lifetime.

Next... Long Ago Sundays, #3... The Discovery of Wetzel's Cave...An adventure you'll not soon forget.

THE END

Long Ago Sundays #4

The Discovery of Wetzel's Cave

by S.K. Hamilton

Long ago Sundays were not always shared with family. Those times when relatives were not in the mood for togetherness, we ten-year olds were free to create our own entertainment, or perhaps I should say, our own shenanigans.

This was one of those days in the lives of *The Restless Rascals* of Washington Avenue. We gathered collectively to concoct some sort of action packed adventure that would alter the beginning of a boring day. Eight kids and eight bicycles filled the front yard at my grandparent's house that Sunday. It was time for a plan to come together.

Bo Mox climbed to the Captains high place, (the top of the porch steps). He stood, hands on hips, feet apart, looking down at us. The Voice of General Patton boomed and bore into our heads. Here was Zoro and General Patton all wrapped up in one.

"Listen up gang. Be quiet Sylvia." A stern look shot in my direction. "That's better. Who's got an idea for what we're gonna` do today?"

What a speech! What a way to organize! What a line of attack! When he's grown, he'll make corporal, at least. Bo's attendance at the infamous Lindsey Military Academy automatically placed him in charge of strategy and made him our fearless leader, the brains of the outfit. Can you imagine the size of my head when he invited *me* to the once a year Military Ball at the end of the school year? Hmmm...one problem. I was in love with...oh, never mind, that's another story.

Billy Neidert our own *Rambo* was the first to answer. "I say we go somewhere on our bikes."

Wow! Brilliant idea, I thought. Billy was just plain gutsy...like Rambo...only Billy's hair

was blond and curly, he was shorter and had no hair on his chest.

“I don’t care where we go. Let’s just go.” Skip Boyd spoke up. He was stupid and the only reason the guys liked him was because he was a sharpshooter. There wasn’t anything he couldn’t do with a slingshot or a bee-bee gun. Many times, we witnessed the killing of innocent little birds with the use of that deadly weapon. We girls planned his murder but it never took place.

Jerry Bercket, the older guy, was always trying to worm his way in with us. Most of the time he made it. He was thirteen, going on twenty. He towered a full foot above us. Jerry was our ‘fruit raider’ guy. He was the one that could reach the branches of trees where the best fruit hung out. Most of the time, he climbed the tree and shook the branches. We always took him with us on fruit raiding maneuvers. You’ll read about his great ability in -- Long Ago Sundays #5 -- Stolen Fruit Makes Better Pies.

Jerry wasn’t popular with our parents. In fact, we were not supposed to hang-out with him, for more reasons than his elderly age. Like all parents, trivial things bothered them. For instance, he smoked, quit school, and had been in trouble with the law. Parents did not understand him and they allowed small things to destroy his credibility. But they didn’t know how really ‘cool’ he was. He always knew something we didn’t know and he always knew a place to go that we hadn’t been.

“I know where a cave is. I know all about it too,” Jerry said with pride. His eyes took in all of us. Then he looked up at the sky and waited for the Hip-Hip-Hooray cry. He had our attention now. Endless questions followed.

“Where is it Jerry? Is it far from here? Have you been there, Jerry? What’s it look like? Is it big?”

“It’s called Wetzel’s Cave. This guy Wetzel were a real pioneer man, same time the Indians and Daniel Boone were here. I learnt that in school. I’ll take ya thar, if ya want me to.” (Now in

case you're wondering what kind of talk this is, it's West by God Virginie hillbilly mountain talk). Some of us were born with it others just didn't have it.

So it was, Jerry Bercket, the dangerous one, wormed his way into our meeting and into our confidence. He had valuable knowledge of a mysterious cave which was located in the woods off the new highway. The highway meandered past Morningside sub-division which was built and developed by my grandpa Gary and my father. I considered it my little corner of the world, and still do. Morningside lives in my heart and I go there often in mind and spirit.

Immediately, our adventure began to take shape. The plot thickened, the vote was cast, and a unanimous YES took the ballot. (No Bush versus Gore problem here.) Jerry was selected to lead the way to the cave. Little did we care that he was over the hill at thirteen. He was our vital link to this newly acquired information, regarding a mysterious cave. With Billy, Bo and Skip around what could possibly go wrong? We girls had nothing to fear but fear itself. Protection was readily available.

Our journey began early afternoon. The weather was nice and our enthusiasm mounted as we gathered provisions for the trip.

"Okay gang. We'll need snacks, cold drinks, an ax, a ball of string and a flashlight. Girls, you git the snacks, Bo get the ax, Billy git the string and I got a flashlight. Bring yer sling shot, Skip but not yer BB gun. Don't need no stinkin` accidents. Be back in five minutes. Don't want to waste the day away." Jerry roared as we scattered in all directions.

His intelligence must have come with age. Who else would think of snacks and cold drinks?

In less than five minutes we were all back with provisions. Hopping aboard our bikes, The *Restless Rascals* were off and peddling, leaving the real world behind. We passed vacant fields where wild flowers colored the ground and beckoned to be picked, but this was no time for girl stuff. Our mission called for serious maneuvers, and picking wild flowers was not serious. We

girls pretended not to see them but gave a thumbs up meaning we'd make a mental note of the location for later.

We crossed the railroad track into the neighborhood of Claytor, traveled downhill, woods to our left and railroad tracks on a fifteen-foot incline to our right. Remember the days of Ho-Bo's? Now they're called homeless derelicts or vagrants. Well, anyway, they hung out in this area. We used to drop paper sacks of food along the roadside for them. But never mind, that's another story.

Reaching Morningside sub-division, the newly constructed highway, leaped in front of us. A huge barrier erected by the city blocked the road which was under construction and there was only enough room for one bicycle at a time to clear the boards. We passed around that barrier at top speed, like it wasn't there. The City of Wheeling must have known we were coming and didn't care.

On our way to the cave, we rounded a couple of curves and on the last up hill climb Jerry brought us to a squeaking halt. A certain foreboding section of woods shot in front of us and we knew by instinct, we'd reached the cave. We pulled to the side of the road, single file, left our bikes unlocked and entered the thick, overgrown, creepy wooded area. Our excitement mounted but the steep downhill terrain and the heavy underbrush, gave us an eerie feeling. Jerry was leading the pack, all seven of his Black Sheep Squadron followed behind him, single file.

Looking over his shoulder, he bellowed. "Watch out fir snakes. This is the time `a year they be looking` to strike somthin`." Geezz, he was smart. He knew everything. I couldn't wait to be thirteen and three quarters.

Jerry blazed the trail through the woods and after tromping downhill for what seemed like hours, we came upon a slight clearing that incorporated an abundance of rock formation on the hillside. There in the middle was an opening in the side of the mountain. Could it be the cave?

Yes, there it was bigger than life and right in front of us. Shouts rang out and we all praised Jerry. The boy's patted him on the back. We girls wanted to hug his neck but thought better of it.

Our composure returned. We looked around to find we were standing only a few yards away from the edge of a steep ravine which overlooked the railroad track that ran adjacent to the muddy Ohio River. Looking down was scary and only *Rambo*, *The Brave Heart* dared get close enough to see the river.

"Git away from the edge. What ya wanna` do, kill yerself? Now git over here and set. Bo's gonna` tell us the plan."

Acting in accordance with his pleasant command we all sat on rocks, logs and the ground. Our attention turned to Bo.

"Okay, gang. Here's what we do." Hand clasped behind his back, Bo, walked in a small circle, staring down at the ground. He must have learned that in military school. Generals did that when making important decisions.

"Jerry will lead the way into the cave. I need two of you to follow him."

"Okay, we all said at once. Two of us would follow Jerry inside, that was clear. But to whom would this honor go?

"Who wants to do it?"

"Mary Ann and I will do it." I said, raising my hand. Mary Ann gave me a side glare. She squinted her eyes and made her mouth go thin. I figured with that look, I was in trouble.

Billy, Bo and Skip readily shook their heads in approval. I remember wondering what happened to *Rambo The Brave*, and *The Sharpshooter*, and the brains of the outfit. Somehow, they chose a back seat and in so doing, would forfeit the glory.

The plan came together. Billy would hold the ball of string at the entrance of the cave; I was to hold the end part of the string and Jerry would guide the way with the flashlight. Mary Ann would take the ax. I always wondered what the ax was for.

We put this ingenious plan into motion. Ann and I held onto the string as we three entered the cave. The string, I hope you understand, would keep us from getting lost and alert Billy on the outside if trouble cropped up. I wondered if this was the method used by Lewis and Clark and Daniel Boone. If it wasn't, I bet they would have appreciated Jerry's mastermind.

The narrow passageway was scary, cool, damp and musty. The flashlights single beam did little to light the way. We could hear water dripping and once something 'wooshed' past us. Mary Ann and I let out a scream.

"Jerry! something just flew past Ann and I...I...I....The sound echoed through the cave.

"It's just a bat. Quit yer screamin`:

"Oh, is that all. Well, I'm not afraid of bats." I lied big time.

We advanced slowly, stooping and trying to keep from falling against the wet stonewalls on either side of us. Care was taken with each step. Finally, we came to a monstrous room. We stood straight now and stretched. Standing silent, we looked around. The cave's ceiling seemed to reach to heaven. It just kept going up and up. The water trickled from the rock walls making a weird echoing sound...the musty strong odor... colder now, but easier to breath. This was the most awesome place we'd ever seen. Mary Ann broke the silence, turned to me and said. "We better get out of here. Why did you make me come with you, Sylvia? I though we were best friends." She didn't smile.

"We...we are best friends. But...but there might be treasure in here and I...I wanted to share it with you."

"Oh! Okay then." Mary Ann said. Her reply let me know I'd made up the right answer.

“Don’t talk or you’ll wake them bats.” Jerry had a convincing way about him. As he shined the flashlight around, we could see another opening in the wall across the room. Then Jerry discovered a terrible thing. Our ball of string had run out. The controller on the other end signaled us. It was time to turn back for safety’s sake. Mary Ann and I protested but Jerry said we could come back later with more string. We knew when he said that our parents would have been proud of him for this logical thinking and adult reasoning.

Reluctantly we exited the cave, keeping in mind that we were lucky Jerry brought us to this place. Our discovery would undoubtedly go down in history and we would all become famous explorers of our time. Our names would go up in light and famous people would want our autographs. Shirley Temple, The Little Rascals, Roy Rogers and maybe even Zoro, the one that copied Bo and...oh there are too many to mention.

Hurrying home, I’m sure we each pondered the day’s events. What would we recount to our parents concerning the discovery? Should ‘forbidden’ Jerry be mentioned? How much should we reveal and how much should we withhold? There were eight of us and I would be willing to bet that eight different stories were in the making. The exception would be Jerry. I doubted that he ever told his parents much of anything. From what I overheard the grownups talking about, Jerry’s parents cared little of what he did or where he went. I felt sad for him. He was so smart but nobody liked him. Not even his Mom and Dad. If this is what being smart means, I’d rather be dumb.

A conclusion of this exciting discovery of a mysterious cave in the wilderness of the mountains by seven little people and one aged person was revealed that night at the supper table.

I don’t remember word for word, how the conversation went, but this is close.

Daddy said to Mother. “Helen, I was reading in the paper this morning that Wetzel’s cave was discovered when they put the road through. They’re going to start extensive research on it

soon.”

“What else did it say?” Mom asked.

“It seems according to West Virginia history an explorer by the name of Wetzel discovered the cave and surrounding territory in the early 1800’s. He lived in it and was hiding in it when a band of Indians almost captured him. Scholars think he got away. The cave was named after him.”

“Where exactly is this famous cave?” Mom asked.

“They’re not saying. Don’t want a lot of folks and kids mulling around trying to find it. I imagine it’s deep in the woods and hard to get to. Maybe even dangerous.”

My eyes must have popped out of my head. My hopes for fame and fortune flew out the window.

The *Restless Rascals* returned trepeatedly always pretending that we were the first to discover Wetzel’s cave.

Stay tuned for another exciting, sweet but naughty, adventure. “Stolen Fruit Makes Better Pies.” Long Ago Sundays #5.

THE END

Long Ago Sundays #5

Stolen Fruit Makes Better Pies

by S. K. Hamilton

Looking back, I see that our parents and grandparents got as big a kick out of what we young people conjured up on those weekends and summer vacations from school, as we did. Most of the time, that is. The exception was one special unexpected dark night when our luck ran amuck.

The day started out as any other ordinary Friday. Good moods escalated as the day wore on. School, although just beginning for the year, was out for the weekend and we Restless Rascals of Washington Avenue looked forward to two glorious days of being our notorious, mischievous selves. Grandpa and Grandma's house was the hub of the action. As usual It was the Alpha and the Omega of most our follies. Sometimes, Mary Ann's house across Washington Avenue from my grandparents became the center of activity.

Friday nights were usually reserved for movie going. The "Pike Theater" ran continuous serials featuring, Tarzan, Hop along Cassidy, and the ever favorite, Roy Rogers, not to forget his horse, Trigger. To miss one of these serials meant you were either sick in bed or you were being punished. Punished, of course, for some trivial act you committed.

We saved money all week for the nine cents price of a ticket. With luck, we could swing another nickel or dime for a soda pop and hot buttered popcorn. My silver cup money, "Long Ago Sundays #5" bought me a ticket and all the goodies I could eat and share with my friends.

Six p.m., the meeting time and no one dared be late. It took us approximately 40 minutes to walk the Avenue, (at a turtles pace, that is) then turn left at the Pike highway and walk three more blocks to the theater. We enjoyed the left over time buying our goodies and meeting school friends from different neighborhoods. Parents and Grandparents usually retrieved us at nine

o'clock when the movie was over unless it was pre-arranged to walk home. Contending with and obeying Wheeling's ten p.m. curfew was a terrible burden. It made it difficult to be home in time before the whistle blew. I figured the guy who invented that rule had bad kids and that the way to get them in the house at night. Lingering a few minutes into the second run of the movie usually meant disaster. We left the theater, running like the Coyote chasing the Road Runner for our homes. Police cars paraded the avenue and we had to duck for cover more than once. Finally, we arrived home, outsmarting the law, but not our parents. That's when trouble began.

"What? Not allowed to play outdoors after dark for a week" And can 't go to the movie next Friday night? Aw but Mom..." You can see why we didn't play cops and robbers or stay late at the movies very often.

Saturday arrived, finally, in all its glory. The trees rustled in the fall wind. They would be bare in only weeks. This was football playing weather. The grass yellow with age would soon be brown. The summer would lay dormant for a season.

Trouble was lurking just around the corner, waiting for The Restless Rascals

This time we met at Mary Ann's house. Without fruit, my Grandma Gary could not make pies for our Sunday get-together. This would never do. The plan was immediately put into affect. We would raid the best fruit trees in the neighborhood.

Once again, Jerry Bercket, the old one, entered the picture. Remember him? He was our leader to "Wetzel's Cave" in Long Ago Sundays #2. Once again, we had no choice but to include him in our plan. He was tall and could reach the low limbs and pluck the best fruit of all. With sacks in hand, we began our thieving escapade. On all other occasions, the fruit was gathered only from the ground and now and then from the lower limbs. The pickings were slim that particular night so before we knew it, forbidden Jerry, was in the top of the tree shaking the

life out of it, telling us to fill our sacks. We were somewhat dubious about doing so but by now all the good apples were on the ground and we figured, why let them rot and go to waste.

Suddenly war broke out. Floodlights came on and the area lit up like the “General Electric” plant. Jerry, practically fell out of the tree and we all took off like a flash of lightening. The fear of God truly hit us. The owner of the bountiful fruit tree stood outside of his door shouting for us to stop or he would call the law. No one stopped!

I arrived at Grandpa and Grandma’s scared to death. I imagined everyone else was equally as frightened.

I tried to pretend nothing was wrong by taking a bath and getting ready for bed. That only created suspicion. No one ever gives up “stay up time” that easily. When the phone rang, I jumped out of my skin. I knew who it was. Grandma answered the phone and by her tone of voice, I knew it was the neighbor about the stolen fruit. I was petrified and just knew I would be in jail for the rest of my life. At that point, I did the only thing I knew to do. I prayed. God must have been listening because not one of us ever ended up in jail or prison.

The next day Grandma found us all together and called us over to her. “Listen close now.” She said. “I received a complaint about you last night. If you don’t want to be in trouble with the law and Grandpa and I, you’ll obey me. You children may gather as much fruit as you want from the ground but never touch the tree. Remember. When fruit falls to the ground before it is ripe enough it will never mature and the tree will produce less fruit. Mr. Sanders was terribly upset and what you did hurt him. That is no way to make friends and treat your neighbors.”

“Er...yes ma am.” We all chimed in. I said, thanks to God and went on living outside of jail.

Grandma made our pies in spite of it all and “The Restless Rascals” enjoyed every bite while eating under the street light after dark on that night.

However, before we were allowed to enjoy our pie that evening, we were to deliver a home made pie to Mr. Sanders. Made from his own apples.

“Will he be mad?” Do you think he’ll call the law? What should we say to him?” I ask Grandma.

“Are you sorry you did what you did? Grandma asked.

“Yeah, and I’ll never do it again.” Everyone agreed with a nod of the head and a low murmur of uh-huh’s.

“Then tell him the truth. Tell him your sorry and it won’t happen again. Maybe he’ll forgive you.” She said. “I don’t know. That’s the chance you’ll have to take.”

That *maybe* word was little consolation. All those that shared in the eating of our apple pie went with me. They say there is safety in numbers. I depended on that.

To our great surprise, Mr. Sanders was kind and even invited us in for some home made apple cider. We went away feeling all the better for making a new friend.

We continued to steal out fruit from the ground only. Mr. Sander’s was always our favorite place to start. I’m sure he kept an eye on us from indoors. Our famous raids were always after dark as this made it less apt to be caught and a lot more fun.

Grandma continued to bake pies and cakes from stolen fruit. Long ago Sundays remained fun and happy for years to come. Grandma and Grandpa are gone now and I am a Grandmother myself. I often wonder if she communicated with neighbors more than we knew. I believe she did. She was a peacemaker, getting us out of trouble all the time by just being her sweet self. She loved children. She loved us all.

Look next for, “Long Ago Sundays #6. “A Trick and A Treat for Mr. Shortell.” Sometimes good things come from bad.

THE END

Long Ago Sundays #6

A Trick and a Treat for Mr. Shortell

by S.K. Hamilton

This particular Halloween, our neighbor, Mr. Shortell realized he was not too old, even at one-hundred-years of age to learn that sometimes good can come from bad. Ironically, the Restless Rascals of Washington Avenue learned the same lesson.

Mr. and Mrs. Shortell, better known as the cranky, crabby elders of the neighborhood, complained about everything from no rain to too much rain.

We supposed they were jealous because they had no children or grandchildren of their own and as a result their lives were dull and boring.

The Shortell's lived five houses from my grandparents. The straight line of identical housing represented building in the 1930's. They were irritatingly symmetrical. Each two-story house was ten to fifteen feet apart. Each had a front porch elevated approximately six feet above the ground. A sidewalk led from the steps to sidewalk that ran parallel to the curb. A huge Poplar tree, same size, same planted spot, shaded each house. Harmonious to a fault.

The two-foot perfectly groomed, two and one half foot hedges that separated the yards were absolutely perfect for endurance races. Our races began at hedge #1, my grandparents house. The race ended at, (you guessed it) Mr. Shortells-- hedge #5. Poor Mr. Shortell. He must have loved his groomed hedges, as he snipped each blade of foliage and trimmed them to painful perfection. I felt sorry for him at times, knowing his days of caring and hedge clipping were doomed.

"On your mark...get set...go!" Bo shouted. The race began. By the time we reached the Shortells hedge our endurance level failed. Unfortunately, it was a matter of falling into the sticky bushes rather than jumping over them. Mr. Shortells beautiful manicured hedges were crushed in the middle and just about everywhere else. They suffered many setbacks to say the least over days to come. Covered with give away scratches, leaving little prickles of blood, we managed to pull ourselves together.

"Get out of here." Billy, our fierce leader hollered, and with our last ounce of breath, we shot like a cannon ball from the crime scene. I lingered slightly behind trying to pick the thorns from my leg. That's when I saw Mr. Shortell come running, frantically, from his upstairs apartment. I thought surely he was going to fall and break a leg, or worse, his neck. He did neither. He bellowed at the top of his lungs so loud I was certain the whole city of Wheeling could hear him, not to mention our families close by. For a man in his hundreds he certainly had a strong set of lungs. We ignored his threats to call the law, merely because the threat's were ongoing

Racing to our homes, Halloween popped in my mind. I imagine because it was getting close. Our plans were fixed with one exception. Mr. Shortell would now be at the very top of our 'trick list. In fact he was the only one on the trick list. The war was on.

"Mr. Shortell is going to be tougher than the bull," Ann said, referring to Long Ago Sundays #4 The Bull Chase. We all laughed. We'd show him it didn't pay to be cranky with the Restless Rascals. But then we considered if by chance he did give us some treats we'd have to call off the tricks. But that wasn't likely. At least if he lived up to past years.

"See you at dark." I hollered, then hurried indoors. Nothing to do now but wait for Halloween.

Finally, two days later, the sun went down and the moon came up. The bewitching hour was upon us. Except for the shimmering reflection of the almost full moon the night was relatively dark, cool and full of mystery. A perfect night for goblins, witches, vampires and ghosts... and Mr. Shortell.

It was fun to pretend, to make our own costumes as scary as possible and our parents considered it a privilege only a child is entitled to enjoy. Contrary to some opinions, no harm ever came from our make believe.

Two full hours of gathering treats in our baskets, eating our weight in sweets, being invited into homes, having our pictures taken and being complimented on our customs, we began working our way home. The best part of Halloween was yet to come.

We needed no escorts or cars to follow us. We were safe to travel for miles on foot or bikes in those days.

The Shortell's house was last. No lights were on, of course, which meant he was Halloween unfriendly. How could anyone be so mean?

“Is everyone ready?” We heard Billy ask.

“Yea--let’s do it.” Bo whispered.

With a ball of string in hand, (The Restless Rascals went through a lot of string) Billy carefully, quietly and with out hesitation crept up the six steps to the top of the porch. He stopped briefly before proceeding to the front screen door as though listening for impending danger. He tied one end of the string around the screen door handle, and threw the rest of the string over the edge of the porch behind the door. Mary Ann and I, hiding in the bushes at the base of the side of the porch caught the string and giggled.

“Be quiet,” whispered Billy as he descended the stairs on tiptoe.

“ I love to see a plan come together.” Ann said.

“Yeah, me too.” We giggled quietly using only the facial expressions and body language.

.Bo now hid behind the hedge on the city sidewalk. He was designated as our lookout and signaler. Making some sort of a weird noise (supposed to be a birdcall but sounding more like a chicken), he signaled for us to begin. Ann and I looked at each other.

“You ready?” She whispered.

“Yup. Let `er go.” She pulled on the string making the screen door slam open and closed with a bang each time.

We did this three or four times before Mr. Shortell turned on the porch lights and headed down the steps of his up-stairs apartment. Of course, when the lights came on we stopped the banging. Ingenious, don’t you think? Mr. Shortell pushed the screen door open and waved his fist in the air.

“You kids get the blazes out of here before I call the law. And believe me, I will call this time.” He disappeared up the steps to his apartment. Do it again. Go!” the word from our lookout, Bo, rang out.

Again Mr. Shortell came huffing and puffing down the stairs. Hollering threats that rang through the air. We giggled the whole time.

Then we laid low for five or ten minutes hoping he would think we were gone. Strange how the tables can turn so quickly. Suddenly, from out of nowhere a police cruiser came creeping by.

Total shock hit us.

Mr. Shortell, had indeed, lived up to his threat. What fools we were. Never underestimate a person in their hundreds. Like a streak from Hades we headed for the back yard and the alley which ran behind garages of each house in the same sickening symmetrical order. Everyone scattered in different directions. Ann and I raced to my Grandparents garage which was as big as a museum, where we hid until we felt the coast was clear. Mary Ann ran for her house through the yard and across the Avenue and I hurried into the house.

This Halloween Eve was over. Wishful thinking I soon learned.

The next day which was Sunday, a surprise was in store for all of us. Grandma gathered us together and explained the seriousness of what we did. Our prank, she explained, could have caused Mr. Shortell to fall, or worse yet, to have a heart attack. She ask how we would like it if someone did that to our loved ones. Grandma Gary always had a way of making you understand. Rather than scolding, she explained. She did not rule with an iron fist. She ruled with a heart and mind full of love, understanding and truth. Tears in our eyes were close to spilling over. Then she explained that the police had talked to her and promised if we apologized, in a sincere manner, to the Shortells the law would dismiss our wrong doing, but only this once. Of course, we agreed. Besides realizing that we could have killed Mr. Shortell

we definitely did not want to spend the rest of our lives in jail, nor did we want the burden of ending a life on our shoulders.

Grandma sent us marching down the sidewalk with her home baked apple pie. Grandma saved many a day with her pies. Somewhat fearful of confronting The Shortells but with hopes of a pardon from a jail sentence I rang the doorbell, My friends stood behind me backing me up. We waited and waited and waited. Finally Mr. Shortell opened the screen door and in his gruffest voice said, "Yeah--whatda ya kids want?"

Stammering, I said, "We...we...we're all sorry for last night. We don't want you to...to fall and break your neck or have a heart attack, so...so please eat this pie and you'll be okay." With that I handed him the pie. He smiled the kindest smile I'd ever seen and then called to his wife to bring some forks, paper plates and apple juice. We all sat on the porch eating, drinking and talking.

Billy the brave hearted asked. "Are you one-hundred two or one-hundred three, Mr. Shortell?"

He and his wife laughed. "No boy, not yet but getting close."

New friends were made that long ago Sunday and the 'Restless Rascals' once again escaped jail. A powerful lesson was learned on both sides. Good things can sometimes come from bad.

We shared many more talks and pies and two more Halloween's with our new friends, the Shortells. Their front porch became a happy place to visit. No more tricks only treats.

Mr. Shortell died of a heart attack two years later. We cried. Grandma told us, "It is Mr. Shortells time to be with God. I'm sure Mr. Shortell will look down from heaven and be with each and every one of you, in spirit, taking care of you every Halloween for the rest of your

lives. Then someday on the front porch of heaven you'll meet again for pie and apple juice and talk of the good old days."

None of us will ever forget our relationship and how it all came about with our one hundred-year-old friends, the Shortells. Halloween from that time on was remembered first for Mr. Shortell and second for witches and goblins and ghosts. But never another trick.

Coming next...Long Ago Sundays # 7, The Bull Chase. This is a story of impending danger and another lesson learned for the Restless Rascals of Washington Avenue.

THE END

The bewitching hour drew near. Except for the shimmering reflection of the almost full moon, the night was dark, cool and full of mystery. Shadows of a thousand years rose again unseen. Voices whispered in the trees, "Tonight is Halloween!" A perfect night for

Long Ago Sundays #7

The Bull Chase

by S.K. Hamilton

Authors Note

Heaven only knows how a handful of innocent eight to thirteen-year old neighborhood boys and girls could get *into* and *out of* so much mischief in so little time and with so much ease. We

were equally as good as we were naughty. The term ‘unbridled,’ although rather severe, labeled us. At times, our good intentions turned sour.

Astounding differences prove to be true from one generation to another; from the then and the now. Our fun was clean. There was no room in our life for drugs, alcohol or any other disabling substances. We were high on life itself, just as it was. Clean, clear unadulterated thinking motivated our ability to function, to create and dream. The lack of drugs kept us out of jails, hospitals, and morgues, at least for the majority of young people.

Times changed as did people. Slowly, surely after World War II, and possibly without intent, the law of the land began to decay and with it came a decrease in God’s law also. Leaders of our country began to believe they did not need God to prosper. They kicked God out of prayer in the schools, recognition on coins and dozens of other ways. In truth, we were destroying the very principals and morals that this nation was founded on. It didn’t happen over night. Time crept up on us and all of a sudden, we were wallowing in moral destruction. Family principals began to take a back seat to right as opposed to wrong.

This story takes place in the yesteryear of my life.

Unspoiled green rolling hills with dots of rainbow colored wild flowers showered the ground. Secretive silent wooded areas surrounded our homes in the valley, and we grew up loving the outdoor world of magic. Our very own world where we were free to roam and wander safely at will.

We gathered at Mary Ann’s house this time. Hanging around with long faces not knowing what trouble to get into first. Bo spoke first.

“Let’s play softball. Want to?”

“Naw. It’s too windy.” Billy said.

“Windy? Windy? That’s it. Let go on the hill and fly kites.”

“Yeah,” everyone agreed.

“Go home and get your kites and meet back here in ten minutes.” Bo the ever knowledgeable commander said.

“More fun than playing Tarzan and Boy in the woods.” I shrugged and said to Mary Ann.

“Safer too. Remember last Sunday when the grapevine broke and Billy fell and hurt his arm real bad?”

“Yep. It’s a wonder he didn’t break his neck. Those dad-gum grapevines are dangerous.”

Mary Ann said.

We laughed remembering when my collie dog Carlo doubled for Lassie. Wading barefoot in crystal-clear icy water, or gathering wild flowers for Mom’s and Grandma’s was the highlight of many days.

Spring flowers peeked through tender new grass decked in all their splendid shades of purple, pink, and yellow. Tiger lilies growing on the bank of the railroad track decorated the incline with yellow and orange, dotted and streaked with black and brown.

“Better go get your kite, Sylvia.”

“Okay.” Grandma’s house was just across the street so no worry about getting left behind.

Flying kites on the hill behind Mary Ann’s house always thrilled us. The hill property belonged to Mt. Decanal Catholic Academy. Never mind that it was a no trespassing area. Ironically, the fence was slightly broken down at our entry point. (I often wondered how that happened.) The half acre that separated Ann’s house from the hill made it safe ???difficult for the opposition to see us. Besides there were no “hill cops” to our knowledge, so we were reasonably safe.

Once we crawled under the mysteriously broken down fence and climbed to the top of the windy hill, we set our kites flying. Each kite made its way higher and higher until it was barely seen. What a great time for Mary Ann, Billy, Bo, Skip, Sally and Joey and myself.

Times like this make me believe that God created the windy month of March for children and kite-flying.

Running true to form, we eventually tired. The March winds stopped cooperating so it was time to look for new horizons and greener pastures. Right there in front of us running adjacent to our kite-flying hill loomed the greener pasture...on the other side.

“Lets go to Sylvia’s and then to the deserted cabin at the top of the hill.” Mary Ann spoke up.

“Yeah. We can take a short cut through the pasture, hit the railroad tracks and follow them to Morningside. We get there fast like that.” We all knew, Bo, the brains of the outfit would come up with impressive intelligence.

“Okay, you guys, I’ll hold the fence up for ya all.” Billy, was not only brave but he was kind. The short cut was a brilliant idea except for one small detail. We believed all the animals inside the fenced pasture to be cows. Little did we know or care about the bull that was among them. To us, he was just another cow and we were certainly not afraid of those black and white milk givers. After all, when you've seen one cow you've seen them all, or so we thought.

Billy was probably as strong as Rambo and the dare devil of the group. We crawled under the fence and started for the other side.

Glancing over my shoulder about a quarter of the way from entry I saw Billy, the last one under the fence running for his life and shouting, “The bull’s chasing me. Get to the tracks fast.” Never in your life have you seen a race like this one.

KIDS—VERSUS--BULL!

Finally, we reached the safety of the railroad embankment. The barrier that separated us from the bull was a welcome sight and we crawled under the fence to safety. Phew! It was a close call.

The seriousness of the whole episode registered on our brains when we turned to witness the bull standing as close to the bob wire as he could get, snorting and pawing the ground ferociously. This bull was Ferdinand in the flesh. The harm that could have come to us was immeasurable. As for the bull, he was only trying to protect his girls, which in latter life we understood. We were a threat to his heard and he wanted no part of us, nor did we want any part of him. Matadors... we were not.

Never again did we venture even close to that pasture, but many more months of March found us on the hill flying kites to our hearts desire and side glancing that pasture to see if Ferdinand (as we now called him) the bull still lived there.

“Long Ago Sundays #8, A New Year Thank You is about a very unusual time lasting from New Years Eve to New Years day. Don't miss this party.

LONG AGO SUNDAYS #8

A New Year Thank You

by S.K. Hamilton

The soundless snow fell softly that New Years Eve day in 1945 on Dorman Road. A blanket of white covered the hills and valleys of my hometown. The silence was awesome. Snowflakes surrounded us like magic.

Morningside, the subdivision my Daddy and Grandfather developed, remained unspoiled by snowplows. Of course my elderly parents and neighbors had a different opinion of snow, less favorable, I supposed because they were forced to drive on icy roads. I wondered why they complained. They could have stayed home and enjoyed the beauty of it all. I felt sorry for them. They were too old to sled ride or make snow angels, so they grouched all day long.

After a lengthy conversation on the telephone, Mary Ann and I finalized our ingenious plans for New Years Eve. We were anxious to complete our usual dreadful chores so we could get on with the fun.

.Generally we rode bicycles or walked. Not this icy, snowy day, though. Mr. Wilhelm, Ann's Father, of German decent, a stern man, dropped her off around 10:30 New Years Eve day, which fell on a Saturday.

My Grandmother Mason, Mother's Mother, of German decent also, lived with us. She would be our sitter when Mom and Daddy went to the dance. We called her Ma with a short (a). No one was more old fashioned than Ma. Her black hair hung down to her waste, but she wore it in a tight bun at the back of her neck. She wore support stockings and black lace up shoes. She was old.

We wiled away the morning sled riding until we were called for lunch.

Mom served scrumptious hot old fashion vegetable soup cooked in a built in 'deep well' in the left hand back corner of the stove, very similar in operation to the crock pot of today. What a delicious hot winter lunch...that is until Ma decided to have some of her Limburger cheese. If you've never smelled Limburger cheese, believe me, you don't want to.

Mom fiddled around in the kitchen preparing some sort of fancy dish, I guessed for the dance.

“Sylvia! What’s your Mom making. It looks funny.” Ann wrinkled her nose and asked.

“I think it’s tiny bites of food. It is pretty though on that lace doily, don’t you think?”

Ann looked dubious. “Well, all I can say is, I hope everyone eats a big supper before the dance or their stomach’s will be growling.”

The whole concept was depressing. Mom would be laughed at for presenting a dish like this, I thought.

“Why doesn’t your Mom take her wonderful vegetable soup or better still, Ma’s Limburger cheese,” Ann asked. We burst out laughing.

Reasoning convinced me the cheese would have been a total disaster.

“Yeah, everyone will blast out the door holding their noses.” I’d said. “We’ll just have to think of a different way to get it out of the house.” I’d said. Oh, it was awful, and Ma ran it right past our noses on the way to the refrigerator.

“Yuk! Lets get out of here, Ann.” Faster than the Road Runner we jumped into our snow suits and out the door we flew.

Tracing tracks in the snow, deciding which little animal they belonged to, kept us busy for most of the afternoon.

“Look, Sylvia. Little bird scratches. I bet they’re hungry.”

“Aw...we’ll throw some bread crumbs out for them latter on.” I said.

We recognized, the paw prints of rabbits, and the deeper hoof prints from deer as they fed along the edge of the woods in our back yard. What freedom they enjoyed. What fun it was for us to have nothing more to worry about than discovering tracks of our little four-footed friends.

The afternoon passed quickly and we were at last called indoors for supper. After shedding our snow suits and garb, we hurried to the table to enjoy another good hot meal cooked this time by my Ma. I was grateful that Mom did not serve any of those little sissy things she was taking to the dance.

Mom and Daddy dressed in all their finery. The occasion was formal. Ladies in long dresses and black coat and tie for gentlemen.

Ann and I settled down in front of the warm log fire in the living room to plan our next activity.

I had always believed Mom was as pretty as a model. As she descended the stairs into the living room I remember thinking, *she's gorgeous*. She looked like a movie star. Her white gown against her olive skin made her look like a queen. She wore elbow length white gloves. And Daddy, well, he was the cat's meow in his tuxedo. As always, 'The Apple of My Eye.'

We kissed good-bye and promised to be good and obey Ma.

Ma began preparing for our promised taffy pull. We helped her, if you could call it that. The mess we made was similar to the atom bomb, but she never complained. Ma was an expert when it came to pulling taffy. It turned out perfect every time. Taffy is temperamental; it isn't easy to make. While we waited for the candy to cool enough to pull we played a game of dominoes, Ma's favorite pass time. Soon it was time to pull the taffy. We laughed and giggled as the taffy got whiter and whiter the more we pulled. Finally it was ready to cut and wrap in wax paper. Mary Ann and I handled the wrapping very well. We wrapped a piece then ate a piece until only half of the taffy was left.

Another game of dominoes and one more piece of taffy, we obeyed Ma and pretended to go to bed. Ma heard our prayers and then retired to her own room across the upstairs hall. Her ritual, Friday and Saturday nights, was to sit in the dark in her rocking chair in her bedroom and enjoy

one shot of whisky or bourbon along with one warm beer. An old German custom, she explained. This was her quiet time and I was taught never to interfere. I often wonder now what her thoughts were, what memories she relived, or what worries she might have had. Strangely, to me, this ritual was totally out of character according to her prim and proper nature. But, she got around it by claiming it was her sleeping medication. And who was I to question that.

“Let’s get up and do something. Want to?” Ann suggested.

“Okay. Soon as Ma starts snoring we’ll know she’s asleep.”

Ann and I were wide-eyed and bushy tailed and full of ourselves. After all, we’d been waiting for the midnight hour all day. The time to bring in the New Year was close and we didn’t want to miss it.

No one could snore like Grandma and not be asleep. The rafters shook. The floor vibrated. Time to make our move. We arose quietly, tiptoed down the stairs through the kitchen and on downstairs to the basement, while Ma lifted the roof with her snoring.

Entertaining was Mother and Daddy’s life style and they did so graciously with finesse. They called the basement their ‘wreck’ room. I always thought that was such a silly thing to say. It was far from a wreck. Mom and Daddy kept it spotless and very well decorated.

Daddy covered the bar with glass and underneath were pin-ups from the Esquire magazine, a man’s magazine. (Not like Playboy, please.) I cut them out very carefully and Daddy placed them under the glass top. The pin-ups made quite a unique counter top, for a bar that is. Christmas lights outlined the bar area and to the right was the ping-pong table where tournaments were held.

Mary Ann and I played ping-pong until we tired. About 11:30 we decided to play bar tender and customer. I don’t remember whose idea that was but I’ll never forget what was behind that bar.

“Let’s have a taste of this one.” Naturally, Ann agreed. I poured a little glass for each of us and then another. Soon we were feeling giddy and giggly and the whole world was wonderful. When the midnight hour arrived we were determined to celebrate outside like the grown-ups did. The one flaw in our remarkable New Years Eve plan--we forgot to provide the noisemakers. Mom’s pots and pans along with spoons would just have to do. And boy did they *do*.

Staggering slightly but still in leave of our senses we proceeded to the outdoors. It wasn’t long before our celebration woke the neighbors and tragically enough it woke Ma too.

We were having the time of our life until we turned to find Ma standing in the doorway, hands on hips, scowling. She spit out a threatening warning, demanding that we come in the house and go directly to bed. We obeyed but vowed to get even with the Brant’s who never liked us. We just knew they called Ma and turned us in.

“What have you two been into?” Ma said leaning close to my face.

“Uh...nothing. Nothing at all.” I said and Ann chimed in.

“No, nothing really, Ma.” Ann said in a whisper.

“I know better than that. I can smell it. And worse, you’ve told me lie.”

Ann and I looked at each other. We knew we were in deep trouble.

“First thing in the morning you parents are going to know about this, Sylvia.”

“Ma, please don’t tell. We won’t do that anymore.” I cried.

“It’s too late now. You two have been bad and your parents need to know about it.”

No use pleading. Ma sent us directly to bed. The next morning was painful for two sick little ten-year- old girls. Our whole life crashed before our eyes and we knew we would probably never see each other again. The nosey Brant’s would be to blame for ruining our life long friendship and we swore never to forgive them. We managed to get through the day but not without worrying most the time. When we looked at Mom or Daddy we just knew they knew.

and wondered when they would lower the boom. Why were they waiting? What punishment were they planning?

By the end of the day we wondered if a miracle began to take place.

Ma never told on us. She kept the secret between we three. She must have convinced the Brant's to keep silent about the whole affair. After all, she was always baking pies and cakes and taffy and fudge and stuff and sharing it with them, so I guess they were smart enough to keep their mouths shut.

To this day, I do not remember thanking Ma for this kindness and show of love. Therefore, I'll do it now.

“Thank you Ma, for you know what. This story is for you and I'm sending my thanks and love with it. Forgive me for being naughty at times and disobeying you. Remember, I love you more than I ever said.”

I sincerely hope you've enjoyed these short stories of my childhood memories. They are as close to fact as I can remember. Thank you for letting me share them with you.

Sylvia Kaye Hamilton