

editorial opinion

"Between the lines"

by Carl Stoddard

'Claws'

A strange yarn of pursuit

No one suspected it. The young girl was resting peacefully in a small clearing. Above and around her, the stately pines bent slightly with the warm Michigan breezes. She didn't hear the bear, approaching—until it was too late.

The next morning a Boy Scout troop found the body in the city park and called the police.

The chief of police arrived, along with a young college man who had spent the last several years studying bears.

"No cause for alarm," the chief told the reporters who had gathered around the postage stamp size city park. "This girl was killed by a lawnmower. It wasn't a bear. The huckleberry squashing contest can go on as planned."

The young man, with anger showing in his face, strongly disagreed. "I've spent seven years studying bears," he said. "I even have a Smokey the Bear signal ring and Gentle Ben's autograph. So listen to me."

"This girl wasn't killed by a lawnmower. She was attacked by a Great White Polar Bear."

The police chief stamped both feet twice and said "Impossible. There's never been a polar bear sighted this far south. Maybe in Bay City, but never anywhere south of Rochester, and certainly not this close to Detroit."

"You're a fool if you don't believe me," the young bear expert said. "Look at those footprints. Look at this Eskimo Pie wrapper. Those are unmistakable signs of a Great White Polar Bear."

"And not only that," he added, "but if my guess is right, this bear is what we call a 'rogue' bear—meaning he likes to travel alone."

The news naturally shook up the folks in the city. The more timid locked themselves inside their homes. The more adventurous went hunting, and soon half the city was swarming with bear hunters.

Naturally, no one caught the bear. They never do in epics like this. It was time for the hero to arrive and he did.

"You've heard of Buffalo Bill/Cody?" he asked the police chief. "Well I'm not him. I'm Bear Bill Brody, and I can get that bear for you. But it's gonna cost you \$25 and a six-pack of Hamm's beer."

The chief allowed as how that was a steep price, but the city was desperate—what with the huckleberry squashing contest fast approaching—and so the city council voted to meet Bear Bill Brody's price.

THE GREAT BEAR hunter agreed to take the bear expert (who was now referring to himself as a "bearologist") and the chief of police along on the hunt.

They set pots of honey out in the center of the park where the young girl had been killed. Bear Bill Brody then hid behind the cement hippopotamus. He was holding his bear-killing knife between his teeth.

The chief and the bearologist hid in a couple trash cans.

They didn't need to wait long. Just as the sun was about to disappear behind one of the high-rise apartment complexes to the west, one of the honey pots began to rattle.

Bear Bill Brody lunged from behind the cement hippo, the knife in his hand.

"Oh my," said the bear. "I'm sorry. I didn't know it was your honey."

"Bear Bill Brody stopped dead in his tracks. He looked at the ruly, pol, little bear and tried to speak but couldn't."

It was the chief who figured it out first.

"Well, if it isn't Rooh, the younger brother of the 'Pook," he said.

"Who did you expect?" asked Rooh. "Yogi?"

The bearologist crawled out the trash can where he had been hiding. "We expected to see a Great White Polar Bear."

"OH MY, gracious no," said Rooh. "Great White Polar Bears seldom come south of Bay City, Rochester maybe, but not this close to Detroit."

"Then who or what killed the girl?" asked Bear Bill Brody.

"A lawnmower," said Rooh. "I saw it happen. I tried to warn her—but I was too late."

Rooh didn't quite know what to say next. He looked around and noticed the honey pots were empty. "Say," he said at last in his soft little voice, "do you have any Eskimo Pies?"

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"Around the edge"

by Jackie Klein

Tolerance melted by tears

In this generation of nomads, doesn't every kid have to get the wandering fever out of his system?

It's the "in" thing for the youth of today to take to the road in a beat-up car squeezed between bed rolls, back packs, a box of worldly possessions and three other nomads.

That's what I keep telling myself. The rationalizations work for everybody else's kids. But when our son Keith left for California, job-style, for six months or a lifetime, my tolerance and understanding melted with my tears.

Keith is soft and loving on the inside, casual, I don't-care-keep-it-cool-cynical on the outside. He loves animals, babies, his family, his 1968 Mustang, stereo and food, although not necessarily in that order.

He never remembers special occasions like birthdays, anniversaries, Valentine's Day, Christmas, Chanukah or Mother's and Father's Day. A week later, when he's reminded he'll say it's not the 25 cent card that counts, it's the sentiment.

A TYPICAL "Keithian" addressed to his parents is, "You don't know how to live. If I were you, I'd be traveling through Europe." In the meantime, we're still here and he's on his way to California.

Another all-time favorite quote of Keith's was, "The trouble with me is you never gave me the opportunity to know real poverty." He's certainly making up for it now.

His never-to-be-forgotten complaint was aired before he blew \$200 on a three-dollar double that amount on a Honda and the rest of his savings on a stereo, all of which he has since sold.

Keith will never make Esquire magazine—Field and Stream, maybe, but Esquire, forget it. Two pairs of blue jeans took him through high school and two years of college. He stuffed his en-

tire wardrobe into two paper bags when he left for California.

A FEW years ago, he returned after two months of dishwashing at an eastern resort, a woolly, shaggy bearded barefoot wanderer with long, flowing locks. When he finally shaved and cut his hair, he made it perfectly clear it had nothing to do with us.

Keith is a star athlete. His favorite indoor sport is opening and closing the refrigerator and making the chow disappear. This he does between gulping diet aids and lifting weights to lose excess pounds.

Our son is many things. He is boy tugging at the man he wants to be. His favorite record is "Martin, Bobby and John" and he cried when they were assassinated.

He calls his younger sister a "spoiled brat" but patiently plays chess with her and teaches her how to play baseball. When he used to come home from work at night, he never failed to look into her room to see if she was sleeping.

HE'LL LEND a friend his car or his money, take care of his sister's dog and cat, take a lone-some kid under his wing, lavish affection on his three-year-old nephew and be a sympathetic sounding board for anyone at all.

He's shy, introspective, liberal, exasperating, determined, immovable and caustic. He's happy, sad, boyish, mature, witty, moody, lazy, ambitious, thrifty or extravagant, depending on the situation. He's all of these and mostly unpredictable.

Keith has moved from apartment to house to back home more times than we can count. My address book under "K" is filled with crowd-out addresses and phone numbers. But we saw him at least once every week or two.

Every kid has to get the wanderlust out of his system. But why does it have to be ours?

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