

Sterling Siren



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Editorial Note: I witnessed a remarkable event this week performed by my wife and daughter, both lovers and preservers of butterflies. In the Sterling garden area, Barbara watched hundreds of Gulf fritillary caterpillars consuming the passion flower garden vine, in its third year of growth here. The plant was stripped of vegetation and my daughter posted on-line a request to see if anyone was willing to transfer some of these caterpillars to plants in their gardens. My daughter took some to her home and a local pollinator enthusiast took some to her home and to a food source at Green Meadows. Over a hundred caterpillars were saved and allowed to chomp elsewhere. What a passion for nature. Ron Lewis

WHAT IS THE BEST FOOD FOR BIRDS? By Barbara Lewis



THE EARLY BIRD GETS THE WORM. Not so fast. According to scientists, the best food for birds is caterpillars. They are abundant, as there are over 14,000 different kinds of butterflies and moths in North American which produce caterpillars as part of their reproductive cycle. Unlike bugs, they have softer body tissue to push down the throats of young nestlings. They are a nice size as they grow by eating the leaves of many plants. In comparison, it takes 200 aphids to equal the volume of 1 medium size caterpillar. They are higher in proteins and fats than other insects and provide carotenoids which are necessary for good health and a vibrant color display in males. Ninety-six% of American terrestrial birds rear their young on insects instead of berries and seeds; caterpillars are the most nutritious of the insects they eat.

What plants and trees are best in your yard to provide caterpillars to attract birds? A small group of "key stone" plant species can provide an abundance of caterpillars. As trees go, you can't beat the oak tree. They are #1 on the list, with cherry and willow not far behind. Nut trees, maple, tulip poplar, and elm round out the list. Anyone care to guess how many oak trees are on the Sterling campus? Flowering perennial plant key-stone ones are golden rod, sunflower, joe-pye weed, geranium, and violet make the list.



Sterling Estates West Library Update by Barbara Lewis



For new and old Sterling folks: There are 2 libraries at Sterling. One is in the Legacy Room, which is on the left side of the downstairs entrance to the mail-room and the Grille before the elevators. This is where the largest number of books are stored. The books are **free to BORROW** but need to be **returned** when finished reading them. There are 2 wooden bins to put returned books, on the right of the entrance door. A smaller collection of books, and also puzzles, are in the Media Room in the Hampton. Books can be borrowed and returned to either site. Please donate any books you have been reading! Despite Jenine Steele and I buying books lately (Sterling reimburses us), many shelves are still looking empty. We prefer books to be no older than published in 2000 and have print large enough for older readers' eyes. We desire mostly fiction and large-print books. The Stratford also has a small bookcase of puzzles in the breakfast area.

Food for Thought- The Cultural Diversity of Food by Ron Lewis

As summer winds down I thought I would get an end-of-season article on *Citrullus lanatus* on the record. It is an annual flowering plant, scrambling and trailing vine-like, of the Cucurbitaceae family (gourd family with 695 species and 95 genera) is a highly cultivated fruit worldwide, in tropical and temperate regions, with more than 1200 varieties. You non-Botany-type people may also know it as **watermelon**. Its large edible fruit is a berry with a hard rind and no internal divisions and is botanically called a pepo. The sweet, juicy flesh is usually pink to deep red. It can contain many black seeds, but there are seedless varieties.

Almost everybody enjoys watermelon in the hot summer months. Even the rinds have potential, mostly as pickled, for which there are many recipes. Patsy Randolph, an African American entrepreneur in Harlem during the Great Depression, collected watermelon rinds from street vendors and transformed them into pickles that she sold along with pepper sauces and relishes. The rind can be used to make candy or curry, as well. Some even ate rind as stewed or stir-fried.

After we would have our fill of watermelon during the summer we would cut the rind into thin blocks and carve buck teeth out of them which could be placed behind our mouths in front of our teeth. We would also have seed spitting contests to see who could propel those the farthest.

Wild watermelon seeds were found in prehistoric sites in Libya that dates to approximately 3500 BC. They were domesticated in north-east Africa and cultivated in Egypt in 2000 BC, although they were not the sweet modern variety. Sweet desert watermelons spread across the Mediterranean world during Roman times. Considerable breeding effort has developed disease-resistant varieties. Many cultivars are available that produce fruit within 100 days of planting. In 2017, China produced about two-thirds of the world's total of watermelons and became the world's leading consumer.

Watermelons were originally cultivated for their high water content and were stored to be eaten in dry seasons, not only as a food source but as a method of storing water. Early watermelons were not sweet, but bitter, with yellowish-white flesh. Early varieties had very tough rinds, almost impossible to open. In the 7th century, watermelons were being cultivated in India, and by the 10th century had reached China. The Moors introduced the fruit into the Iberian Peninsula in 961 and 1158. The fruit began appearing in European herbals by 1600 and was widely planted in Europe in the 17th century as a minor garden crop. Europeans colonists and enslaved people from Africa introduced the watermelon to the New World. Spanish settlers were growing it in Florida in 1576, and it was being grown in Massachusetts by 1629. By 1650 it was being cultivated in Peru, Brazil, and

Panama. Around the same time, Native Americans were cultivating the crop in the Mississippi valley and Florida. In the Civil War-era-United States, watermelons were commonly grown by free black people and became one of the symbols of emancipation. (This sentiment evolved into a racist stereotype where black people shared a voracious appetite for watermelon.) Seedless watermelons were initially developed in 1939 by Japanese scientists, allowing them to become more popular in the 21st century, rising to nearly 85% of total watermelon sales in the United States in 2014.

As of 2017, farmers in approximately 44 states in the United States grew watermelon commercially, producing more than \$500 million worth of the fruit annually. Georgia, Florida, Texas, California, and Arizona are the United States' largest watermelon producers, with Florida producing more than any other state. The largest recorded fruit was grown in Tennessee in 2013 and weighed 351 pounds.



Sugartown Melons Stand,
Sugartown, LA

Watermelon is a consumed fruit of summer as fresh slices, diced in mixed fruit salads, or juice. This juice can be blended with other fruit juices or made into wine. The seeds have a nutty flavor, and can be dried and roasted, or ground into flour. Adding light salt to the red meat of watermelon enhances the sweetness and draws the sugar out, as well as contrasting any bitterness in that particular slice.

Now you don't think that this Louisianian could not add some Louisiana culture into this watermelon story. I, as a boy, had an "uncle", Levy, (actually a husband of one of my dad's first cousins), who every summer would insist that on family gatherings during the summer in Lake Charles, Louisiana, we have watermelon from his home town, Sugartown, Louisiana, north of Lake Charles, my boyhood home, and near Deridder (16 miles east). His claim was that this was the sweetest and best watermelon in the world. He was an avid gardener and after eating fresh ears of corn just picked from his garden we would feast on Sugartown watermelon.

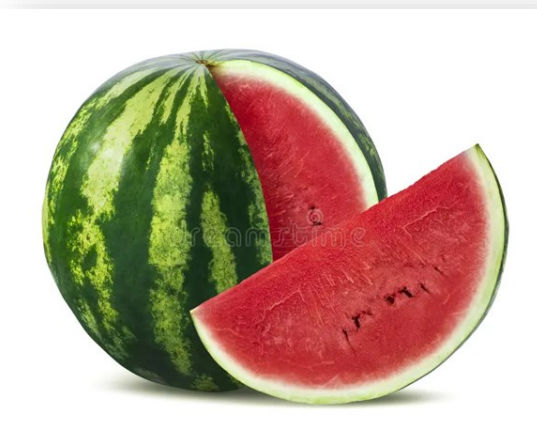


A "Sugartown" watermelon

Now Sugartown is still an unincorporated city in Beauregard Parish (yes, we don't call them counties in Louisiana), with a current population of 187 people (2020 census). This was the first permanent settlement in Southwest Louisiana after the Louisiana Purchase, in around 1818, home to the first cotton gin west of the Calcasieu (Screaming Eagle- Choctaw term and Parish in which Lake Charles is located), the first local school, the earliest cemetery and church. By 1861 there were about 150 families living within ten miles of Sugartown. The township was a major stopping point for travelers from Lake Charles to Alexandria because Sugar Creek was easy to ford at this point. It allegedly got its name from a story of a wagon that overturned while crossing the creek, spilling its expensive and delicious sugar cargo into the creek. It lost out when the railroad diverted to Deridder, Louisiana.

Food for Thought, cont.

Sugartown is famous for its watermelons. The original was the “Crimson Sweet” but the melons grown today are mostly hybrids. Local growers and vendors say the real secret to the sweetness of Sugartown melons is the deep (about 15 feet) sandy soil in which they are grown. Watermelons in Sugartown vary in size and sell for \$8-\$12. The most expensive watermelon in the world is grown on the island of Hokkaido in northern Japan with prices ranging from \$250 to \$6000 each. People from Arkansas also claim to grow the sweetest watermelons in the world. For many years, four men, Winfred Moses, Burt Boggs, Milford



Summer time watermelon

Lacy, and WL Lewis have been recognized as the largest producers of Sugartown melons, and are considered the local melon experts. Like all the melon farmers, they believed that when you say Sugartown melons, it means the best and something that is not found anywhere else.

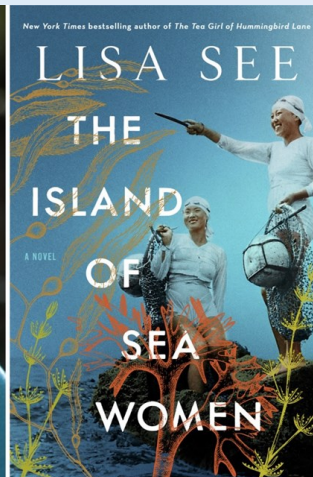
The Sugartown Watermelon Festival was born in 1966, becoming a way to let the community celebrate the watermelon season (May-September). Melons are judged for size, uniformity, sweetness, color, and taste. There are seed-spitting and watermelon-eating contests.

This article is dedicated to my deceased “Uncle Levy”. They are the reddest, sweetest watermelons that I have ever seen or tasted!

Page Turners Corner- Comments on *THE ISLAND OF THE SEA WOMEN*

by Barbara Lewis

Lisa See has been involved in writing for most of her career. She was early-on a correspondent for Publisher’s Weekly on the West coast as well as a freelance journalist writing articles and book reviews. She is the author of *On Gold Mountain* which tells the story of her Chinese family’s settlement in Los Angeles. “I’m part Chinese. My great-grandfather came here to help build the transcontinental railroad. My great-grandfather was the godfather/patriarch of Los Angeles Chinatown. I don’t look at all Chinese, but I grew up in a very large Chinese-American family. I have hundreds of relatives in Los Angeles, of which there are only about six dozen who look like me.” She has always been fascinated by Asian stories that have been lost, forgotten, or historically covered-up, whether in the past or present. Her novels *Tea Girl Of Hummingbird Lane* and *Snow Flower and The Secret Fan* are novels our book group has read in the past.



This newer novel is set on the South Korean Island of Jeju and involves the lives of female divers, known as haenyeo, at the end of the 1930s. These female divers, who descend from the 7th century, dive into very cold water for 30 minutes with short breaks for air. This is not done in any other part of the world. This story opens as eight year old Young-Sook is out

with her mother working in their vegetable fields. They hear a noise and find a “would-be” thief hiding out in the bushes.

They discover Mi-ja, a mistreated orphan of a dead Japanese collaborator. The girls become fast friends as Sook’s mother gets Mi-ja to help with the family chores in exchange for food. The girls begin their training to become haenyeo divers when they turn 12. They pledge to never separate their lives. The harbor-less island is a matrilineal society where

strong women work in the fields and dive for seafood to sell, while their husbands take care of the young children, cook meals, and wash clothes.

The Japanese had made Korea into a colony for over 30 years. After WW11, the Japanese lost the country. But then, the victors of the war split up the country, with the Russians controlling the northern part, and the Allies, the south. This leads to a civil war between Koreans who collaborated with the Japanese and those who wanted to be a free independent country. The married women’s husbands are on opposite sides of the civil war. Young-Sook feels abandoned by her friend Mi-ja. The story of the women’s struggles is also the story of the islanders struggle to forgive each other.

The fact that the civil war killed 10% of the island dwellers was suppressed by the rulers of South Korea for over 60 years. It has only finally begun to be addressed in recent years. The story closes as a peace commission dedicates the Memorial Peace Park to honor all who died in what is now known as the Jeju April Incident. This is a true historical story. The island is also a UNESCO HERITAGE site.

Welcome New Neighbors by Gail Watson

Marty and Carter Miller – Cottage 4078

Marty and Carter have moved to Sterling Estates from The Reserve in western South Carolina, but they are originally from Knoxville, Tennessee. Marty was born and raised there, and Carter, born in Asheville, moved there as a child. They both attended the University of Tennessee. After graduation, Carter continued at UT as a medical student specializing in pathology. After their marriage, he decided to join the military before being drafted, and he became an Air Force Flight Surgeon. After his military stint, he joined a team of pathologists at Fort Sanders Presbyterian Hospital and was the senior partner. Marty became an antique dealer with a group who had their business in a mall. They have three sons and one daughter, nine grandchildren, and one great grandchild, with another expected shortly.

Tidbits of History

by Ronald W. Lewis

I have mentioned several times that ideas of what I decide to write in this column come from many different sources. This month a few short introductory paragraphs in the third chapter of a book (pages 39-41) I am reading recounted a story of which I had not previously been aware. The book is *The Color of Law- A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* by Richard Rothstein (Liveright Publishing Corporation, New York, 2017, 341 pages).

“After the Civil War, liberated slaves dispersed throughout the United States, seeking work and to escape the violence of the post-war South. But in 1877 the disputed presidential election of the previous autumn was resolved in a compromise that gave the Republican candidate, Rutherford B. Hayes, the White House. In return for southern Democratic support of their presidential candidate, Republicans agreed to withdraw federal troops who had been protecting African Americans in the defeated Confederacy. The period of black liberation known as Reconstruction then came to an end.”

“Events in the African American town of Hamburg” (originally across the river from Augusta, Georgia, and now a ghost town), “in the Edgefield District of South Carolina, were typical of many others across the former Confederacy where white paramilitary groups mobilized to regain control of state government. In July 1876, a few months before the election, that gave the presidency to Hayes, a violent rampage in Hamburg abolished the civil rights of freed slaves. Calling itself the Red Shirts, a collection of white supremacists killed an African American man and then murdered four others the gang had captured. Benjamin Tillman led the Red Shirts; the massacre propelled him to a twenty-four-year career as the most vitriolic racist in the United State Senate.

Following the massacre, the terror did not abate. In September, a ‘rifle club’ of more than 500 whites crossed the Savannah River from Georgia and camped outside Hamburg. A local judge begged the governor to protect the African American population, but to no avail. The rifle club then moved on to the nearby hamlet of Ellenton, killing as many as fifty African Americans. President Ulysses S. Grant then sent in federal troops, who temporarily calmed

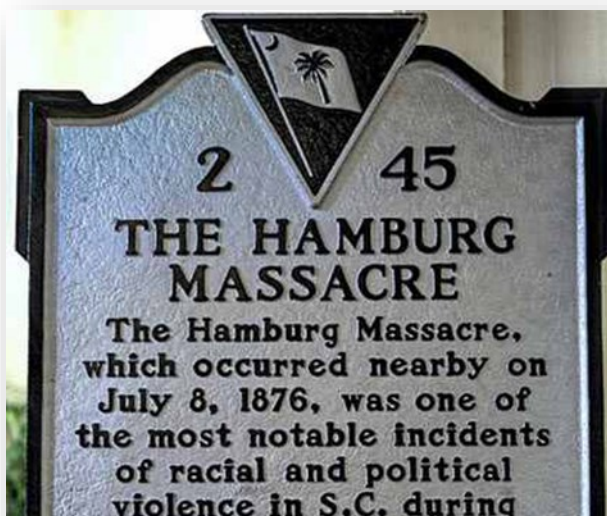
things down but did not eliminate the ongoing threats.”

Employers and landowners in the Edgefield district threatened blacks with firing and eviction threats if they voted to maintain a biracial state government.

“When the 1876 election took place, fraudulent white ballots were cast; the total vote in Edgefield substantially exceeded the entire voting age population.” Similar action across the state “gave segregationist Democrats the margin of victory they needed to seize control of South Carolina’s government from the black-white coalition that held office during Reconstruction.”

“Although a coroner’s jury indicted Tillman and ninety-three other Red Shirts for the murders, they were never prosecuted and continued to menace African Americans. Federal troops never again came to offer protection. With African American disenfranchised and white supremacists in control, South Carolina instituted a system of segregation and exploitation that persisted for the next century. In 1940, the state legislature erected a statue honoring Tillman on the capitol grounds, and in 1946, Clemson, one of the state’s public universities, renamed its main hall in Tillman’s honor. Only in 2015, after the murder of nine black church members by a white supremacist in Charleston, did the trustees of Clemson adopt a resolution dissociating themselves from Tillman’s ‘campaign of terror against African Americans in South Carolina that included intimidation and violence.’ But the trustees can’t take the name off the hall unless the state legislature authorizes it, and the legislature has not done so.”

So ends a story, close to home, of many that describe the ending of Reconstruction across the South, bringing an era of “Jim Crow” laws and decades of violence, including lynchings and the rise of the myth of the “Lost Cause.” We and current students do not learn about these events in a classroom dedicated to state and national history. We need to read it somewhere. We need to be **chagrined**, in its meaning of being distressed not humiliated, as Frederick Allen reminds us in his powerful column in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution of August 25, 2003 (page A15), entitled “ ‘Table of brotherhood’ still beckons”, finding common ground to face the realities of our



“Pitchfork” Ben Tillman



- BEN TILLMAN became a hero of the poor white farmer in SC
 - As Governor he had a new constitution passed which required a LITERACY TEST for voting to make it hard for blacks to vote.
- The GRANDFATHER CLAUSE allowed people to vote if their grandfathers could vote in 1860...this benefited the poor white farmers who could not read or pay the poll tax

Note to this copied illustration the word benefited is misspelled.

time. I, for one, am troubled by the fact that this armed militia got away with these terrible acts, but I look around and see other “armed militia” still are present across America, even today.

Why?

Memorium to Chuck Merchant by Ron Lewis

Although he had moved from Sterling Estates several months ago, we all grieve the loss of our former cottage resident, Chuck (as we knew him) Merchant. Charles "Chuck" Allen Merchant passed away on Sunday, July 30th at the age of 85 years. He was born on March 8, 1938, in Jamestown, New York. He was a proud United States Army veteran who had served overseas in Korea. His mother was a grade school teacher, and her passion for education allowed him to follow in her footsteps, becoming a career educator with IBM.



Chuck was truly a "family man". He enjoyed the outdoors where he enjoyed fishing, hunting, shooting, camping, and boating. Even in his later life he enjoyed trips to the gun range and camping with his sons, with the occasional "fireside" bourbon.

We here at Sterling realized and observed his passion for woodwork. He was always working on a chest for one of his relatives, or beautiful hand-turned wooden writing pens. He was always there to offer a helping hand for any project we would bring him. He would use on his wide array of tools in his full workshop garage here at Sterling. He was active in the church by leading Bible studies and serving as a Eucharist Minister.

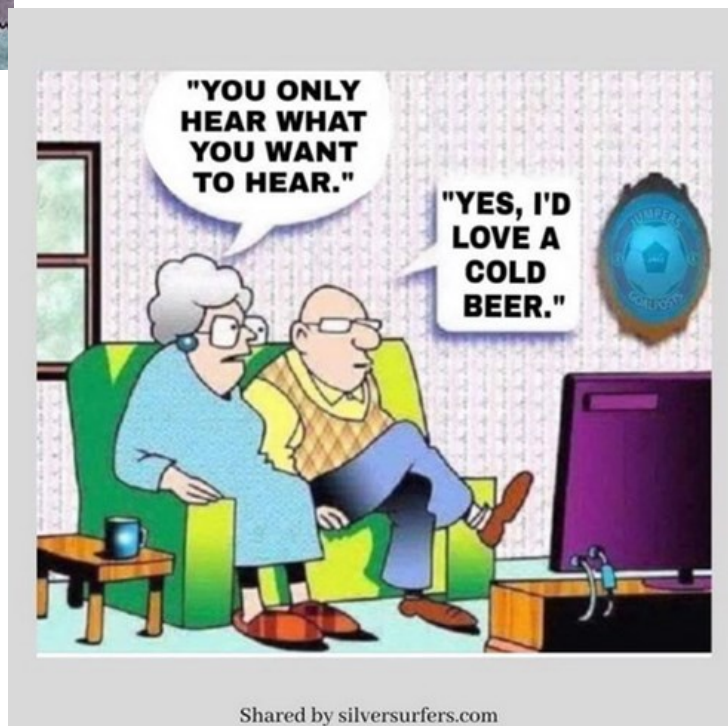
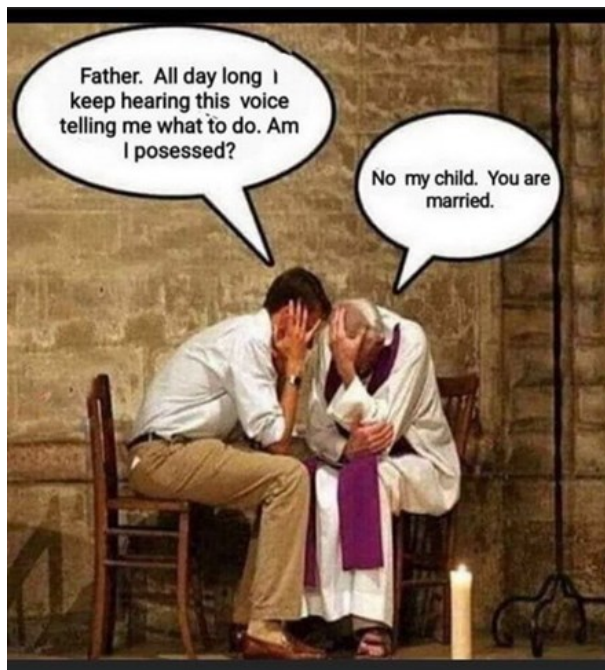
He was a loving care-giver to his wife, Marilyn, of nearly 61 years, and they stood out as a cute couple riding around Sterling in the "Chuck Wagon". They had four sons, Timothy, Keith, Daniel, and Paul (talk about Biblical influence), who have stated that he was the best dad around. He passed on his woodworking skills to them. After leaving Sterling, he was able to find love again and married Susan. A few of us here got to know her briefly. The Lewises and Steeles spent a wonderful meal together with him and Susan after he had left Sterling.

He was survived by his wife, Susan, his sons, two brothers, and six grandchildren. He will be laid to rest at Georgia National Cemetery at a private family service on September 14, 2023.

I, for one, will miss his constant bubbling personality, his wonderful smile and chuckle, and most of all for his wonderful enthusiasm for helping with many wonderful projects that I would bring to him. He was a rare "truly human being".

Reminder: Independent Living Men's Breakfast- September 26, 2023- 8:30 A.M.

Please remember the date. At the August breakfast there were 17 attendees. Join and participate in the discussion. Also, remember to bring a donation to the sponsored employee's scholarship fund named in honor of Jack Vandevate and presented to chosen employee(s) in the Spring and matched by Sterling Estates.



Cartoons submitted by Lynette Erickson

Shared by silversurfers.com

More AI by Bob Erickson

You have seen that the Artificial Intelligence (AI) program, CGAT GPT, can be used to create short stories. Now I wanted to see if AI can create a story with a bit of humor. More specifically, what does a computer program consider “funny” to be?

Here is the only instruction I gave to the AI program

“Write a funny story about a Labor Day cookout.”

This is the result.

Once upon a time, in a small suburban neighborhood, the residents decided to host a Labor Day cookout like no other. It was a day filled with laughter, good food, and a series of hilarious mishaps that would be remembered for years to come.

The festivities began early in the morning, as people gathered in their backyards, setting up grills and picnic tables. Tom, the self-proclaimed Grill Master, took it upon himself to man the grill and cook up a storm. Armed with his apron and an array of secret spices, he was ready to impress everyone with his culinary skills.

As the day progressed, the delicious scent of grilled meats permeated the air, drawing neighbors from all around. The tables were adorned with an assortment of sides, from creamy potato salad to tangy coleslaw, and the desserts were a sight to behold, with pies and cakes that could make anyone’s mouth water.

Now, as luck would have it, the neighborhood had a mischievous dog named Max. Max had a reputation for being a food thief, and he saw the cookout as the perfect opportunity to indulge himself. With his wagging tail and innocent eyes, he roamed from yard to yard.

It didn’t take long for Max to make his move. As Tom was busy flipping burgers, he turned around to find his perfectly cooked patties missing from the grill. To his surprise, there was Max, happily devouring the stolen bounty. The Grill Master let out a hearty laugh, realizing that he had been outsmarted by a cunning canine.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the street, a group of kids had gathered around a table, covered with water balloons. They were giggling and plotting their next move, ready for an epic

water fight. Little did they know, Mr. Jenkins, the oldest resident in the neighborhood, had a prank up his sleeve.



As the kids loaded their water balloons, Mr. Jenkins sneaked through the crowd, armed with a water hose and a mischievous grin. Just as the kids were about to unleash their watery onslaught, Mr. Jenkins let loose a powerful stream of water, soaking everyone in sight. The kids, shocked and dripping wet, couldn’t help but burst into laughter at the unexpected turn of events.

Meanwhile, at the dessert table, a comical disaster was unfolding. Mrs. Thompson, known for her love of baking, had prepared a towering chocolate cake. Decorated with delicate frosting flowers it was a work of art. But fate had other plans.

As the cake sat on the table, basking in all its glory, a strong gust of wind swept through the yard. The tablecloth, caught in the wind’s embrace, fluttered away taking the cake with it. There stood Mrs. Thompson, wide-eyed and speechless. As her masterpiece crashed to the ground in a gooey mess. The neighborhood kids, ever the opportunists, quickly rushed to salvage what they could, scooping up handfuls of cake and gleefully devouring them.

Despite the chaos, the Labor Day cookout continued with even more laughter and camaraderie. People shared stories, danced to the music, and reveled in the hilarious mishaps that had unfolded throughout the day. It was a celebration of community, where the true spirit of Labor Day shone through the laughter, reminding everyone that sometimes the funniest moments are the most memorable

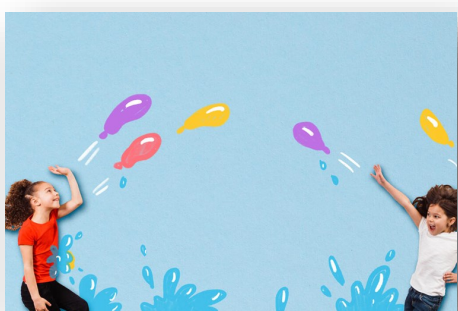
ones.



The story was created in 5 seconds.

Editorial Note: Bob and I felt that AI had not reached its level found in the previous more dramatic story that we published in the Siren. The humor was at best “mild slap stick.” I will leave it up to the readers for their opinions. Comedy writers do much better, but it did satisfy what Bob

had said he wanted in the opening paragraph. It was a story with a “bit” of humor. By the way, I found a grammatical error in the text!



Note: Images found on the computer to illustrate the AI story by Ron Lewis