

A stranger in the night

By Eric Wiggin

The lady in the L.L. Bean goose-down parka strolled up to the man squatting in the falling snow beneath a streetlight. Obviously homeless, he was stuffing a pair of too-large hi-top sneakers with straw apparently stolen from the manger of Baby Jesus on the church lawn behind him. "Straw has been used to insulate clothing for thousands of years," she said.

The old man made a wry face. "Straw was once also used to sop up blood during executions."

"O...kay." She seemed taken aback that her attempt to make conversation had so suddenly turned macabre.

"I'm busy." The ragged man turned his back.

The woman stood there, smiling — her even, white teeth dazzled. "Are you hungry?"

"No." He made a retching noise back in his throat. "I've just come from dining with the President."

The woman smiled even broader, and she put her hand under his arm.

"Whatcha doin', lady?" The street man pulled away in alarm.

A cop strolled up. "Problem, ma'am?"

"No problem here, officer." She smiled at the man in blue. "Just trying to get this old feller to his feet. Will you help me?"

The policeman scratched his head. "That's old Josh. Whatcha want with him?"

"That cafeteria?" She pointed to a sign advertising a seasonal special on ham dinners, half a block away. "I'm going to get Josh — if that's what his name is — some food and get him out of the cold for awhile."

"You're one crazy lady." Josh pulled away. "I don't wanna go in there!"

But strong hands grabbed his other arm and lifted. "Lemme go, copper. I din do nuttin'."

"This is a good deal, Josh," the cop said. "Don't blow it."

"The woman and the cop finally got Josh into the cafeteria and sat him at a corner table. Late evening, and most Christmas shoppers had gone home.

The manager strode up. "What's going on here, officer?"

"This lady brought Josh in for a meal — your \$6.99 baked ham special, I think."

"Not in here." The manager swore under his breath. "Having a wino like him here is bad for business. I'll bet the bum hasn't had a bath in a month."

Old Josh gave a toothless grin. "See, lady. Toldya so. Now, if you'll lemme go."

She turned to the manager and smiled. "Sir, are you familiar with the Lost Girls' Charity that rescues girls from slavery prostitution?"

"Of course." The manager stiffened and glared at the woman. He was proud of his own connection to this ministry. "They hold their monthly meetings in one of my banquet rooms. It brings prominent women from nearly every church in town."

"You do make good money catering these meetings — besides goodwill that brings church members back with their families? True. Or not?"

"What business is that of yours?"

"I, sir, am Miss Dorathea Goodhue, president of Lost Girls."

"I...I do apologize."

"I thought that might make a difference." Miss Goodhue glanced at the cop, who was stifling a chuckle. "Would you like to join me and Josh for a cup of coffee and ham with a baked potato, officer?"

"No thanks. I'm on duty."

"Coffee to go, then?"

"That would be very nice."

"I'll get a waitress to bring it." The manager strode off toward the kitchen.

"You certainly put him in his place." The cop grinned.

"That wasn't my intent. I have a reason for all this." She sat down at the table and peered intently at old Josh. "Remember me?"

Josh smiled, and his broken teeth at once became white and straight, like the wealthy woman facing him. His rags became the jeans, chambray shirt and fleeced-lined canvas jacket of a workingman. The straw-stuffed sneakers segued into cowhide Wolverine work shoes. Josh glanced at the amazed policeman, then nodded to the lady.

"I'm a little older than when we last met," she said.

"I've gained a little weight and some grey hair since I came through that door, cold and hungry. You were the manager that day, filling in for the other guy, who was on sick leave."

"I do remember — you were a college girl. You'd used up your scholarship money and dropped out. Every place you went they said either you were overqualified, or they weren't hiring college dropouts. Your sociopathic boyfriend, who'd used you for sex for a semester, had kicked you out of his apartment because you couldn't pay your share of the rent. You'd spent the night before sleeping in a culvert."

Miss Goodhue blushed, but nodded agreement. "I'd made up my mind that that evening I'd try prostitution," she said, continuing this unpleasant recounting of the sordid details of her past. "I figured I might raise enough cash turning tricks to pay my tuition."

Josh looked on Miss Goodhue with what the cop imagined to be compassion. Josh's countenance registered no surprise, no scorn, no pity. Only infinite love. The policeman almost expected old Josh would suddenly shine like an angel, or that a white horse would magically appear, and they'd ride off together — it was that startling.

"You gave me a job. It was only from Thanksgiving through the Christmas season, but I earned enough to make arrangements with the college registrar to register for classes in January. I now work in commercial insurance, and I'm well paid." Tears came to her eyes. "You also died for me."

Josh spread scarred hands open on the table.

The cop frowned.

"Remember the New Year's Eve riot?" Miss Goodhue said. "The night you took my bullets by shielding me with your body when those thugs broke the door down just as I was closing out the cash register?"

"May I take your order, ma'am?" The waitress passed the cop a hot coffee in a Styrofoam cup to go. She and the cop turned back to Miss Goodhue.

The cop gaped. Miss Goodhue sat alone, smiling primly.

Old Josh had just ... vanished. •



Christopher "Lil C" Blackmer...

with the trophies he won in the 2010 season. Lil C is the son of Chris and Amy Blackmer. He is 9 years old. He attends Edgewood Elementary School and has been racing motocross for four years. He is the 2011 state champion in the SJO Michigan State Fair SX series in the 7 to 11 age group and the 65 cc class. Lil C also took third place in the mini open class for 7 to 11 year olds. Among many other wins this season, he won the championship in the 7 to 9 age group in the Big Air Motocross 65 cc class held at the Big Air track in Newaygo. In the SJO 65 cc series, he won 15 races in a row. His uncle, Tim

"Snapper" Blackmer is his mechanic, and his sponsors are Snappers Ground Pounders, Babbitt's Sports Center, M & M Cable, Red Five, Captain Kibbs and Mognis Racing. Lil C also participates in youth hockey and youth football.

Frozen coleslaw

By Judy Brandow

1 head cabbage – shredded
1 tsp. salt
1 grated carrot
1 green pepper, finely diced
1 onion, chopped
1 red pepper, finely diced

Add salt to the cabbage and let stand one hour. Drain well. Add the rest of the ingredients.

Dressing:

1 C. vinegar
¼ C. water
2 C. sugar
1 tsp. celery salt
1 tsp. mustard seed

Boil together one minute. Cool. Add to salad and mix well. Put into containers and freeze. •



Lil C getting some air warming up for a race.

Village awarded grant from Community Foundation

By FAN staff

Last spring, Jerry Alger was trying to figure out a way to come up with money to install "waysides" which is another word for historical markers. Village history has always been a passion of Jerry's. As our village residents get older and pass on, a lot of history goes with them. Jerry feels we should try to preserve all the history we can for future generations.

Encouragement came from the Fruitport Village Council as well as the Lakeshore Museum. With some research to get prices and information, the idea came up to approach the Muskegon County Community Foundation for a grant.

Also, Alger has always wanted to see a sign at the local cemetery in the village. As far back as he could remember, there has never been a sign and many people never knew the correct name of the cemetery. By the way, it is called "Pine Hill Cemetery," and this land was donated around 1860 by the Jesse Cooley family. (Research is being done to establish the correct year.) Alger always admired the beautiful granite cemetery sign he saw at the Pentwater Cemetery. So he went to Superior Monument to see if one like that would be affordable for our cemetery. After getting a price from Superior he decided to include that in the grant.

So he started the process of applying for a grant. Using the Village of Fruitport as the non-profit organization, Alger turned in the application. The process took several months. After returning from a vacation with his wife, Lynda, he learned that the grant had been awarded to the village. So Alger went to work. He met with the cemetery committee, which is made up of Fruitport Township officials. (The cemetery is actually the property of Fruitport Township.) Drawings of the granite stone were presented to the committee to look over and make changes until they were satisfied. It appears they are satisfied with the latest drawings. The granite stone has been ordered. This is a massive stone, and it should be very impressive. The measurements are five feet wide by four feet high and six inches thick. The stone takes three months to have cut and shipped to Superior for the engraving.

There will be five waysides: Pomona Hotel, the Interurban, Fruitport Pavilion, Spring Lake Iron Foundry, and the Old Village Hall will have their stories told on the waysides. The stories and pictures are being put together. Once the stories and pictures are completed, they will be sent to Fossil Industries in New York State to be made. Fossil makes the finest waysides available. The stands for them will be made by village employees. All the steps to get these projects completed are in the works. The cemetery sign and the waysides will be ready to "show off" by Old Fashioned Days.

This is another step in the on-going process to enhance the quality of life in the village. •