

## Little Jimmy Shoemaker and the Day of Reckoning: A Short Story

Jimmy was seated on the Banting's floral sofa (they looked like roses, but he couldn't be sure). His parents had just arrived, and they were speaking to Mrs. Banting in hushed tones in the foyer and occasionally looking over at Jimmy with a pained expression he knew all too well.

\* \* \*

Even at the tender age of eight years, seven months, little Jimmy Shoemaker was not unaccustomed to finding himself in sticky situations. He couldn't help it; trouble seemed to follow him around like his neighbour's ancient dog, a basset hound by the name of Flipper (on account of his large flipper-like ears), who decided years ago that Jimmy (rightly) needed a companion and protector and thus hobbled after him and howled if Jimmy got too far ahead. But neither Flipper nor anyone else could have dissuaded Jimmy from sneaking into the chip wagon at the fairground last summer and making off with two large helpings of poutine (one for Flipper). And no one could have predicted that he would have found the ladder hidden behind the bushes along the side of the Bailey's house that would have enabled him to climb up to the kitchen window and make off with a tray of freshly-baked butter tarts sitting on the sill to cool (Flipper was a beneficiary of that heist as well). Although Jimmy knew that taking things that didn't belong to him wasn't right, he was seduced by opportunities that, at that particular moment in time, seemed irresistible. And perhaps maybe, just maybe, he was trying (a bit too hard) to impress Annie Hodge.

Annie Hodge was nine years old (and eight months) and Jimmy was as madly in love with her as any eight year old could be. She had long, straight, strawberry-blond hair that fell to the small of her back. On the days that she braided it, it took all the will power that he possessed to keep from yanking on it and running. He would have done it, too, if he was sure that she would still speak to him afterward. She barely spoke to him as it was. At best, Annie tolerated Jimmy's (seemingly constant) presence, much as he tolerated Flipper's. But Jimmy knew that, despite his outward annoyance at Flipper's howling and perpetual drooling, Jimmy would miss him if Flipper failed to show up one morning. He prayed that Annie felt similarly about him, but he couldn't be sure (at least *he* didn't drool). So Jimmy made certain that she couldn't help but notice him by perpetrating one outrageous stunt after another.

Jimmy was seduced by a risk-reward scenario where the odds

of getting away with his crimes were heavily stacked against him. And, predictably, he was caught red-handed far more often than not. But, to the grudging admiration of his grown-up victims, Jimmy never denied his guilt nor pleaded for a lesser sentence. He took his punishment stoically, often doing odd jobs after school as penance for, it seemed, most of the neighbourhood. In fact, despite his thirst for illicit thrills, Jimmy was, by and large, an honest boy. He had drawn his own moral boundaries, and lying was crossing the line. And although his parameters of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour were, at best, unclear to others, they were crystal clear to Jimmy.

\* \* \*

Six-year old (and three months) Fred Banting was the kind of kid that Jimmy would never have looked at twice (he wore idiot strings to keep from losing his mittens, for goodness sakes), but, as it turned out, once was more than enough. Fred was now peering around the corner into the living room, enthralled with the real-life drama unfolding in his own home. His mother had shooed Fred away when Jimmy arrived, but he remained in the shadows and within earshot of the action. Once Jimmy's parents had settled on the floral sofa, one on either side of him, his father asked Jimmy to explain what had happened that had led him to the Banting's on that day.

Jimmy and Flipper had been following Annie around the neighbourhood last Friday afternoon, with Annie only occasionally acknowledging their presence with a casual backward glance. This was more than enough encouragement for Jimmy, who took this as a sign of great affection on her part and quickened his stride, with Flipper loping along as best he could, hoping that this latest adventure would end with something good to eat (as it often did). As they made their way into town, they saw an elderly woman stumble as she exited the bank, sending her bag of groceries and her purse tumbling to the pavement. Jimmy rushed forward and helped to gather the runaway oranges and green peppers and placed them back in the bag. Annie stood close by, but did nothing to help, which mildly surprised him. The lady thanked him repeatedly and, after she had composed herself sufficiently, continued down the street.

Flipper was noisily sniffing at something under a nearby

Continued page 3

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# possibilities unleash your imagination

## Trees

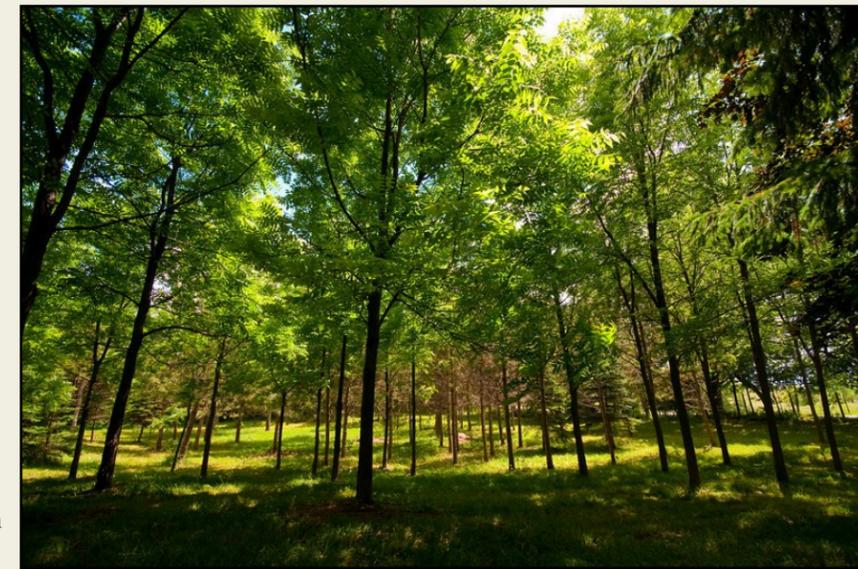
As spring unfolded, the trees in our backyard woke from their winter slumber and the sparse weave of twigs and branches gave way to a canvas of green, providing shade, shelter and beauty in our little oasis. All except one. The last remaining Birch tree, the tallest tree in the neighbourhood, has yet to don its summer clothing, and has now been officially pronounced dead.

The noisy Cardinal, who spends at least 50% of his day there apparently calling out for potential mates with no success, is going to be sad when it comes down. As will I. Because our small backyard can contain only a few, each tree is precious. And when they go, the hole they leave behind is big.

I do love trees.

As a young boy, the trees in our yard were very important. "The" apple tree provided shade over the sandbox where my brother and I spent hours and hours constructing towns and playing out real life scenarios with pint-sized trucks, backhoes,

tractors and cars. And when we weren't under the apple tree, we were in it. It seemed to have grown perfectly to hone the climbing skills of young boys and we would sit for hours perched high above the yard like a pair of birds proudly looking over our domain below. And of course it delivered more than its fair share of sore bellies at the too-green-to-eat stage of early summer, and wonderful warm apple pies as summer gave way to the cooler days of fall.



In the "big yard" in which we played baseball all summer, stood two mighty walnut trees,

anchoring the yard in diagonally opposing corners and providing shade for a good percentage of the ground below. Anyone who has had a walnut tree will know, they are messy things, and in today's world of perfectly manicured backyards with pools and umbrellas, they have all but disappeared from the suburbs. But these particular trees were never admonished for their constant debris, even in the fall when walnuts would fall like torpedoes from lofty heights, covering the ground with impossible-to-rake green golf balls. I still remember their unique smell and can picture myself in the

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Continued page 2



# possibilities

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## Trees (cont'd)

backyard, watching a squirrel navigate the clothesline en route to gathering another green nugget with that smell in the air.

These two trees were like sentinels, watching closely over the children who played beneath them, keeping the sun at bay, providing a place to lean and hide your eyes at the start of hide-and-seek, serving as third base or a foul ball post, and offering a cool and partially hidden place to sit and enjoy an afternoon snack or a chat with friends.

Those mighty walnut trees were my father's pride and joy. They were big and strong, and he had planted them himself when he built the house many years prior to me being born. And he too loved trees.

Dad was born in Baysville, Ontario and until he married Mom, he lived with his family in a log cabin on the edge of 100 acres of land. They farmed a little, but mostly the land was wild, and over the years, it became known to us as "the bush." During my youth we visited Baysville regularly, often for three or four weeks at a time and I have countless wonderful memories of being there, chief among them, my walks in the bush with Dad.

Like every Dad, me included, my father loved to talk about the days of his youth. He did in fact walk miles to school, often through deep snow (although he never claimed it was uphill both ways.) He played hockey for the local team on an outdoor rink and laughed when he spoke of the problems associated with snowfalls at game time. He swam in the local river, and loved to boast about jumping from the top of the steel girders on the bridge. He fished in a creek that had gone dry by the time I was old enough to hear the stories. And best of all, he played in the forest that was his backyard with his brother Cliff.

My Dad loved to go for a walk in the bush, and I loved to go with him. Just me. My Dad was rarely happy if he wasn't doing something productive – be that cutting the grass, fixing something mechanical, or building a new shed. But on those walks, he was calm, reflective and truly at peace. He spoke about the various places they had played as kids, like "the big

clearing," and "the big rock," and he'd chuckle while reminiscing about some of the things they would do at each location. In the absence of the toys children have today, or even the toys I had as a boy, they found more than enough to do with what nature had provided them. My Dad would tell a story and I could tell from his smile and the far-away look in his eyes, that despite the hardships he often spoke about when he relayed stories of his youth, he had in fact been very happy.

I learned a lot about trees on those walks. My Dad could tell you the name of any tree you pointed at, and furthermore he could tell you if it was good for firewood, building furniture, or just for shade. But mostly what I learned about trees on those walks, is that they made my Dad happy. They were woven into his happiest memories, and had formed a significant part of the fabric of his life.

The Baysville property is still part of our family, and while it doesn't see much use these days as a cottage, the bush remains, growing ever more dense and tangled with each passing year. The landmarks my Dad used to take so much pleasure in sharing are mostly grown over. But I know as I walk the trail we used to walk so many years ago, that many of those very same trees are watching over me. I am content, at peace, at home. And I smile as I think of how much I have become just like my Dad.

I'll miss the big Birch tree. But I'm thankful for the shade and beauty it has provided us since we moved here. And I'll plant another tree in the corner when it's gone. I know it's what Dad would have done.

*Bill*



## Little Jimmy Shoemaker (cont'd from page 4)

bench, and Jimmy assumed that the hound had found some food from the spilled bag that had escaped his notice. But when he looked closer he spied a bright red wallet. Jimmy rubbed the drool from the wallet and opened it. Inside there were various receipts, a hospital I.D. card, a picture of a boy who looked vaguely familiar and thirty dollars (two fives and a twenty!). Jimmy had never held that much money in his hands before, and his initial reaction was one of elation. But when he looked up at Annie (he hated having to look up at her, but what could he do, she was a full six inches taller than he was), she registered a look of disgust and walked away without uttering a word.

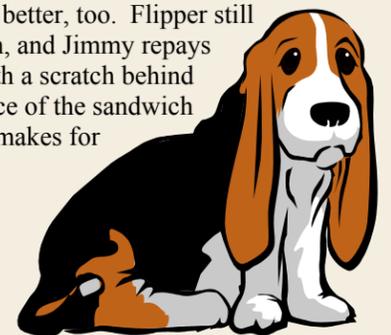
Jimmy hung on to the wallet all weekend, unsure of what to do with it. He had taken things that didn't belong to him many times before and had not felt uncomfortable afterward. Yet, this time, it felt...wrong. She had thanked him profusely for his good deed, and there he was, with her wallet in the drawer of his bedside table. He began to feel something that he would much later recognize as shame. Soon afterward, Jimmy pulled the hospital I.D. card from the wallet and read the address on it. It was five doors down from his own house. He suddenly recognized the boy in the picture. It was that little rink rat, Fred something, who always hung around to watch Jimmy and the other bigger boys play hockey after the little kids were done. Jimmy remembered that he always wore an awful orange toque under his too-large helmet so

that it would fit better. He wasn't all bad though; he could deke a defenseman out of position and score like a much older kid. At least that's something.

Jimmy sat quietly while his parents digested the story. Mrs. Banting left the room momentarily and returned with her mother, the wallet's owner. As soon as Jimmy saw her, the feelings of shame returned. He handed her the wallet, which was sweaty from having clutched it so tightly; she thanked him yet again, which only made him feel worse. The daughter asked her mother if everything was there, and, after a long moment, she declared that yes, everything had been accounted for. At that point, little Jimmy Shoemaker stood up, and in a shaky voice said that there was thirty dollars in the wallet when he found it and that he had spent it. He then said he was sorry, and he meant it, and every grown-up in the room knew that he meant it.

Jimmy has been arriving at the Banting's house every day after school for the past two weeks. The garden has never looked better, and Jimmy is feeling better, too. Flipper still keeps an eye on him, though, and Jimmy repays his loyalty and vigilance with a scratch behind his enormous ears and a piece of the sandwich that Mrs. Banting's mother makes for him each day.

*David*



## Great Minds, Great Thoughts

*"The longer I live the more my mind dwells upon the beauty and the wonder of the world. I hardly know which feeling leads, wonderment or admiration."*

**John Burroughs**

*"You will find something more in woods than in books. Trees and stones will teach you that which you can never learn from masters."*

**Saint Bernard (1090 - 1153), Epistle**

*"Parents are often so busy with the physical rearing of children that they miss the glory of parenting, just as the grandeur of the trees is lost when raking leaves."*

**Marcelene Cox**