

The Fourth of July Chronicles

By Jake Barton

NOTES

The Fourth of July is one of the most beloved holidays in America. This special day celebrates America's independence and is often a day spent with families and communities sharing picnics, parades, and of course, firework displays. Written as a sequel to his popular poem, *The Corn Dog Chronicles*, Jake Barton once again chronicles the hilarious antics of two young boys. This time, however, the setting takes us to small town, America, where the citizens of a rural community are celebrating the Fourth of July with a city-wide picnic and parade. This humorous, yet heartwarming, narrative poem may be entered in either Poetry Interpretation or Humorous Interpretation. There is a lot of humor found within this poem. Play that humor! There is also a very poignant moment toward the end of the poem; this moment should be portrayed with warmth and honesty. This selection serves as a nostalgic valentine to small town America. If used in Poetry Interpretation, the drama mask icons are merely suggestions for where to turn the pages in the manuscript.

It's the Fourth of July.
Lucas and I arrive at the Town Square
Just in time to help the ladies
From the First Baptist Church
Set up the tables for the city-wide picnic.

The women in town love to cook.
Lucky for them, we love to eat.
By mid-morning, all of the tables have been set,
And it doesn't take a Food Network zombie to know
There's enough butter in those fine looking dishes
To lure Paula Deen back to the darker-side of 'non-healthy' eating—
A place where butter and mayonnaise
Make everything taste better.

Barbeque, hot dogs, hamburgers
And dozens of casseroles are the featured attractions.
There are also at least six different types of potato salad,
But the true stars of this picnic paradise are the three, ten-foot-long tables
Set up under the town's oldest oak tree.
These tables are the stars, because they are holding the desserts:
Cakes, pies, brownies, cookies, cupcakes,

And home-made ice cream in a variety of flavors:
Vanilla, fresh strawberry and home-made peach.
The mere sight of all of that sugary-sweetness
Is enough to cause most anyone to go into an instant diabetic coma.



There are still a couple of hours before the rest of the town shows up.
The ladies ask Lucas and me if we would be willing
To empty all of the trash barrels scattered around the Town Square.
Lucas and I happily agree.
The way we see it, we can kill two birds with one stone.
We'll spruce up the downtown area,
And at the same time, we'll collect a few soda cans to sell
At the automated recycle center over on Elm Street,
Because the last time we checked—
America is still free, but fireworks are not.



As we empty out and sift through the trash barrels,
We notice Ol' Man Skeeter, our town's infamous cranky old hermit.
He's scary. All of the kids in town are afraid of him.
Lucas and I have heard he's a farmer,
But rumor has it—the only things planted on his property
Used to have ten fingers and ten toes.
Lucas and I try to ignore him and continue on with our duties.

In no time at all, Lucas and I have collected enough cans
To purchase the Deluxe Fireworks Special for ten dollars!
We're on the last trash barrel when, half-way down the can,
Lucas and I come across a frilly, lacy and very flowery ladies' brazier.
This is not just a ladies' undergarment. This thing is huge!
It's bigger than huge—it's enormous!
At first glance, Lucas thinks it's a tarp!

It never dawns on us to ask ourselves,
“Who, what, when, where, how or the biggest mystery of them all:
WHY this odd article of large clothing is just lying there—discarded—
Abandoned—in one of our Town Square's trash barrels?”
No, none of those questions cross our minds.
We just look at each other and instantly think—“Rocket launcher!”

So Lucas rolls the bra into a ball and tucks it under his t-shirt,
Giving him the instant appearance of having a middle-aged beer gut.

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I confiscate a couple of small ice-box watermelons
From the back of an old pick-up parked on the Square.
I say ‘*confiscated*,’ because sometimes Lucas and I like to pretend
We’re secretly on a covert mission to take down enemy agents!
(If you’ve ever lived in a small town,
You’d understand what we have to do in order to keep our sanity.
So no, I didn’t steal the watermelons!)
One of the local farmers donated them for today’s festivities.



So I slip the small, confiscated watermelons underneath my shirt.
I look like the poorer version of a Tyler Perry routine.
I’m holding the melons near my chest, and I’m using both hands.
As I’m doing this—I think,
“WHY in the WORLD would that woman throw away that BRAZIER?”
Anyone walking around with these bad boys *needs* support! And lots of it!
It makes me wonder if all the women around town—
You know, the ones that have that bumper sticker,
SUPPORT OUR TROOPS
On the back of their SUVs and station wagons—
Are these women talking about our *military*?
Or are they rallying around a more *personal* cause?



Lucas and I slip away into the back alley behind the Piggly Wiggly,
And we each take one side of the rocket launcher
(i.e. the bra *straps*)
And place the two watermelons inside the launch *pads*
(i.e. the bra *cups*.)
We swing the melons back and forth,
And on the count of three, we release the watermelons.
Just as the rockets arch toward the sky,
Ol’ Man Skeeter steps into the alley, sees us
And stops to assess the situation.
Oh, I almost forgot. Ol’ Man Skeeter got this nickname,
Because of these huge welts that decorate his face.
They look like over-scratched mosquito bites;
Hence the name, Ol’ Man Skeeter.

Well, when he sees our organic rockets flying toward him
At speeds that would rival an unchained and very unsocial
Junk-yard dog chasing the postman on Mail Carrier Appreciation Day,