

A Town Named 1234



by Peter Coleman

Every town has a secret and this one is no exception...

There is a town not too far from here named 1234. And why is it called 1234? Well, for 99 years the population of the town was 1,234 people – no more and no less. In the first dozen years or so of its existence it was just a strange coincidence that the population always stayed at 1,234 residents, except one year.

The town became a minor celebrity around the region because of the fuss the newspapers made about the town at census time. However, it wasn't every year that the number of children born and the number of people who died naturally balanced out to 1,234 people. Sometimes "adjustments" had to be made. If there were too many people, the town council would call a special session and they would vote to condemn someone's home and they would have to move out. When this happened three years in a row, the townsfolk demanded the practice be stopped.

Members of the town council met secretly to explore ways of balancing the population so it always remained at 1,234 residents. It just seemed that every time there was a birth someone died soon afterwards; every time people moved away others would become pregnant.

The mayor, Cornelius Sawyer, had been the mayor for the last 34 years. Today, he is the patriarch of the large Sawyer family – eight brothers and sisters. Folks say that the only good thing about Cornelius Sawyer being mayor is that whenever it looks like the town might not have exactly 1,234 residents, then one or more of the Sawyer families move into or out of town to make up the difference.

The town centennial arrived and the folks had big plans for the 100-year celebration. They were expecting 10,000 visitors and all the hotels were booked up.

It was a time of great anticipation and great stress. One crisis was averted after old man Miller passed away from a heart attack just two weeks before the census. However, Cornelius was able to talk unwed mother-to-be, Sheri Billings into having a C-section a little early and in return he would pay her hospital expenses and give her a job at the factory after the baby was born.

The town council met the night before the census in the upper room of the town hall. Cornelius put the doctor on the speaker phone. "Good evening everyone," said Dr. Taylor. "Dr. Taylor, you said you had some news for all of us? Did Sheri have the baby?" asked Cornelius anxiously. "No, things are doubly fine. I just finished giving Sheri her final examination before I perform the C-section; however, I thought I would let you all know that a trick's been played on me."

"What trick is that?" "It appears that someone's been playing hide and seek," mused Dr. Taylor. "Sheri is going to have twins. It seems that one of the babies was hiding behind the other and I never heard its heartbeat until now."

"You hid this from us on purpose," shouted Cornelius. "Don't be ridiculous Sawyer. Sheri Billings has

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been my patient since she was born and I would never keep this information from her," said Dr. Taylor.

"You're right, you're right. I'm sorry doctor, I'm just upset. Not for myself, but for the town. Thank you for telling us and give Sheri our best wishes," said Cornelius.

Many of the council members began to argue, but Cornelius settled them down and called for a fifteen minute recess. Many of the members stepped outside while Cornelius, his brother Ed and his business partner, Poner Barnes met in Cornelius' office. After they shut the door, Cornelius leaned back in his chair and said, "I know exactly what we're going to do."

Twenty minutes later, Cornelius, Ed, and Barnes entered the meeting chamber with the other council members. Cornelius began, "The news we all received is certainly a mixed blessing. It is wonderful news for Sheri, but it puts us in a perilous situation with the census and that must not happen."

There was dead silence in the room and they all realized that someone that night was going to die.

After several moments, Cornelius continued, "I've had a long and good life here in the town of 1234 and I have built a pretty successful business, even made some friends along the way. With my wife, Ginny, passing away several years ago, the town is the only thing that matters in my life. The Sawyer family has had a long tradition of service to the town, going all the way back to it's founding. Our family has sacrificed greatly for this town but don't think I'm complaining. It has been my personal pleasure being your mayor and serving the town for some 34 years. Now it is time for the Sawyer's to make one more sacrifice for the sake of the town. Therefore, I've decided that I will have an accident tonight."

There was a long pause, and then all at once the room erupted in protest. It took a while for Cornelius to quiet the room. "I have already made my mind and no one can talk me out of it. Now Ed, Poner and I have come up with a plan that will truly make it look like an accident and I will feel no pain."

"As you know, Ed is the town mechanic and will simply cut the brake line on a vehicle and I'll be crossing the road just at the time the brakes fail. But we need help. Ed and Poner can't drive the vehicle because it might raise issues with the insurance companies, since Ed is my brother and Poner is my business partner. We are going to need some help to drive the vehicle and we were thinking of you, Tom."

Tom shook his head as if to awaken himself, "You want me? Why me?"

Ed spoke up and said, "Your truck is pretty beat up and it's parked at the top of the hill right outside the building. Now, your truck did just pass inspection, so you would never be liable. If anything, I'd be liable since I'm the one who inspected your truck."

Tom said, "You mean we have to do this now? No, I'm going to need some time to think about this."

Cornelius interrupted, "There's no time to think, Tom. It's got to happen now; look, it's already 11 p.m. Let's go Tom. You just have to start the truck up and point it down the hill. I'll be at the bottom of the hill waiting. You can close your eyes if you want. Listen, I don't like this anymore than you do and we wouldn't be in this mess if Sheri wasn't having twins, but we've got to face reality – one person has to be sacrificed tonight and it's going to be me one way or another." Women began to cry as Cornelius, Ed, and Poner ushered Tom outside to his truck.

The council members crowded around the windows to watch. Tom sat behind the steering wheel of the truck for several minutes. The council members could see Tom clearly from the window. He said a prayer

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and then turned the key - BOOM! The truck exploded into flames.

Cornelius walked past the burning truck and back into city hall with Ed and Poner following. When they entered the chamber it became quiet. Cornelius spoke up and said to Ed in a loud voice, "You were supposed to cut the brake line, not the fuel line." Cornelius looked at the council members and said, "I guess this kind of accident could happen to just about anyone."

Just then the phone rang and one of the council members answered. "That was Dr. Taylor, he said Sheri had her babies, but one was delivered stillborn."