

## Inspirational Poems & Stories

Contributed by **C. Jerome McFarland**

### *AN APRIL EVENING*

He loved to run - the best little runner in the neighbourhood. He could outdo his two older brothers; they were fast, but he always took the lead. And he could skate as fast as he could run - even faster. His first skates were second-hand bob skates, tied tightly with thin leather straps across the toes and behind the ankles of his brown boots. He had just turned eight and was lucky enough at his own birthday party to get the one piece of cake with the nickel wrapped in waxed paper. That was enough money to buy 12 marshmallow strawberry candies and some Juicy Fruit gum.

April: the awakening of spring when robins return, streams fill with trout, and pussy willows announce the lengthening of days and the sun's increasing warmth. The lad donned his rubber boots and skipped up the train tracks to gather these lovely sprigs for a neighbour. He heard the train whistle and carefully placed his only penny on the track. When it was flattened he admired the transformation made by the tons of steel as he felt the warmth of the reformed object in his small hand. Soon, he too, would be transformed. The pussy willows were across the ditch, and he gathered a small bundle and took them to his friend.

He had one more task to do: deliver a grocery order for his employer who paid him 10 cents each week. It was a big job and a lot of money for the young lad. He loved his job. His employers loved him too. They would send him a dozen red roses a few days later.

When his work for the day was finished, he went next door to a school chum's house. As they sat on the front steps the lad proudly showed his friend the flattened piece of copper. They looked toward the street and saw a horse drawn wagon - small wheels in the front, big wheels at the back. The horse was doing the work for the six-year-old driver. It was Thursday after five o'clock. The lad decided to enjoy his first horse-and-buggy adventure. Climbing onto the back of the wagon and facing in the opposite direction was a common thrill for neighbourhood boys.

He hurried to the moving wagon, put his right foot on the axle, and grabbed the small handle on the side. His rubber boots were slippery and the axle was greasy. The fierce wooden spokes reached out and grabbed his leg, pulling it to the centre of the wheel. His school chum ran quickly and released the lad's left foot he had automatically raised to free himself. But it was too late for the lad's right leg. He grasped the small brass handle with supernatural strength and screamed, "Help! Help!" His leg, held firmly by the steel-like spokes, had no choice but to follow the motion of the wheel - around and around and around. The young driver whipped the horse to stop it, but in its confusion the animal pulled while the lad continued to scream for help. When he could hold on no longer, he fell onto the unpaved street. The wagon was still moving. The leg had been completely severed at the knee, and the red gravel was now embedded in his back and attached to his mangled limb. All strength was lost and the air continued to echo his cries for help. A passerby grabbed the horse's bridle and brought it to a halt.

A training centre for military soldiers was located near the accident scene and a sergeant heard

the horrifying screams, jumped the fence and placed the lad, with help from another trainee, onto the fresh blades of spring grass. A neighbour offered a clean sheet, and the green, red and white colours became the background where the injured lad lay.

A crowd gathered. The lad felt no pain now for he was in shock. His body's defence mechanism caused total numbness where the limb had been severed. His Dad ran to the awful scene when summoned by the lad's school chum. As the lad repeatedly cried, "Daddy, am I going to die?" he saw the big tears roll down his father's cheeks as his dad assured him he would not let him die. The ambulance was called but it never came. One man, having seen the gory sight, refused to take the lad in his car for fear of blood stains which would be difficult or impossible to remove. He quickly drove away.

The lad lay there for what seemed to be an eternity – waiting – waiting, and waiting. And the crowd grew bigger – waiting, and waiting. A chauffeur-driven lady was shocked when she realized the reason for the crowd that had formed a semicircle around the exhausted bleeding lad. "To hell with the blood" she said. "Get the kid into the back seat and to the hospital before he bleeds to death".

Carefully his dad and the soldiers lay him onto the covered seat. Holding his head with tender and trembling hands, his dad tried to comfort him, reassuring him that all would be well. An orderly was waiting when they reached the hospital, and the lad was carefully transferred from the car onto a gurney and wheeled into a small ante room. The lad begged for water but was unable to drink when it was offered. He was conscious the hour he had to wait to be admitted – waiting until his father's landlord came to the hospital to guarantee the administrator that he would cover all costs if the boy's dad could not. The landlord did not hesitate.

A mask was placed over the lad's face, he saw stars, and his head pounded until darkness came. He was asleep. It was well after eight o'clock. His dad's blood type was a perfect match and the transfusion was direct as father and son lay side by side during the operation, one giving life, the other, receiving. The doctor finished the amputation. The lad was deeply asleep. He slept as though he would never awaken.

The attending nurse that Thursday had also been the nurse when the lad was born in the house adjacent to the accident scene. Eight years later it was her face he saw when he awakened. "Hi," he whispered, "where is my leg?"

"Go back to sleep, dear," she said calmly. "Go back to sleep".

The pain was excruciating in the following days. The lad could feel his toes, but they were not there. Only a heavily wrapped stump-like object was under the raised sheet.

When he was ready to go home, his dad carried him ever so gently over his shoulder. He wore the new blue housecoat and smiled at the nurse who carried his roses. The journey home was the same route he had travelled 10 days before, only in the opposite direction. His mother wept when she kissed him. His oldest brother gave him a brand new wrist watch purchased from his paper route earnings. The other brother was afraid to see what his sibling would look like so he did not appear for the homecoming. And his five-year-old sister gently kissed him before he was carried upstairs to his bedroom. He was home.

The lad often dreams of running and jumping and skating and soaring through the air on a pillow of soft white pussy willows and red roses – a flattened penny in one hand, and a silver nickel in the other. The dream is always the same. It is a beautiful dream.

“April’s a lovely lady  
 She wears a golden crown.  
 She rides in a golden carriage  
 When she comes up to town.”  
 -Thomas Dunhill-

### **Biodata**

**Charles Jerome (Jerry) McFarland** has degrees in Biology, English and Education from the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton and Acadia University in Nova Scotia. He also has earned educational diplomas from Harvard University in the USA and Manchester University in the UK.

Jerry has experience as a marine biologist, educator at the Elementary and Senior Secondary levels, School Supervisor of Student Services and University lecturer. He is an accomplished pianist and has a certificate in piano from the Royal Conservatory of Music, University of Toronto. He is also a well-known artist in water-colours.

Now retired, Jerry enjoys playing music, painting, journal writing and travelling. He is presently planning his fourth visit to Southeast Asian countries. He lives in Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada, with his wife. They have four adult children.