

# An Evening At Home

*by John Douglas Boles*

It was Friday night and Joe Temple was bored. He sat in the living room of his small four-room house watching television with the lights off. The lighting in the room flashed from bright to dull as the scenes on the 19-inch black and white changed. To those passing outside this caused the house to have a devilish, almost possessed aura. Joe sat watching from his reclining chair in the middle of the room. The chair was strategically placed so he could see into the kitchen and his bedroom without moving. He'd been in the chair all evening unless he had to go to the bathroom or go to the kitchen and get another beer. The cardboard table next to him was covered with empty beer cans, some with cigarette ashes and butts in them, two crushed Winston packs, one Winston pack with six cigarettes left, a Snickers, and a T.V. Guide. Joe glanced at his clock radio in his bedroom. It was 11:11. He had to do something now. He was bored.

Joe sat up and flipped the chair into the upright position. He reached over the right arm of the chair, snatched up his tennis shoes, and put them on. They were only two days old. The T.V. flashed and the room was bright. Joe noticed that the pile of Mike Sells potato chips he'd spilled yesterday had attracted a group of ants. They were hustling to carry crumbs to a hole in the wall. It reminded Joe of when he worked on the loading docks and how they all hurried to get their work done so they could take a break. He noticed a black smudge that resemble a smashed ant on the toe of his right shoe.

"Can't have that on the new shoes," he said as he scooped it up with his index finger and stuck it in his mouth. It felt crunchy and stale. There was no taste, however, except that of the sweat on his hands. Joe stood up, pulled his comb out of his pocket, ran it through his hair, and zipped up his fly. It had been down since his last trip to the bathroom. He was going out.

Joe opened the door and walked out onto the porch. The fresh air was enough to make his head dizzy. It was too clean. He was used to the cigarette-smoke-filled air that he lived in. The walk to the car was the most exercise Joe had gotten since taking a shower and calling in sick to work earlier in the morning.

The door to his '78 Omega fought to stay closed as Joe pulled on the handle. The rusting hinges rasped in objection to being opened. Joe slid down into the driver's seat and closed the door with a sigh of relief. He had made it. The air smelled like stale cigarettes in the car and this too was a relief.

Suddenly he realized that he had no idea where his boredom was taking him. When he was little, his dad would have asked him if he was 'aimless.' He would have to answer 'yes.' But he really didn't care at this point. He was going out. He started the car and pulled away.

Inside the house, the T.V. reverted the light to dullness.

### While You Were Out . . .

It was just about time for the sun to come up when Joe was on his way home. His heart was pounding and his mind was playing tricks on him. He knew what he had done was wrong so why did his mind have to punish him by playing tricks? It wasn't fair; he knew it was wrong. Besides, he would never get caught. He thought about all the candy he had stolen from the drugstore before grade school and how he'd never been caught. He would take his bookbag in the store and ask the cashier to watch it for him. It made the cashier think he was afraid of having things stolen, and she would not keep an eye on him like she would the other kids. He never told this secret to anyone. If he had, other people would have done it, and then the cashier would have watched everyone, including him. He would put candy down his pants and in his coat pockets; then he would get a pack of gum and pay for it. He always bought Wrigley's Juicy Fruit. It was his trademark. At school, he would sell what he had stolen.

"You were a smart kid, Joey. You never got caught; let's not start now," he said to himself. "There are only six stop lights until we get to our road. Just get home," he encouraged himself. Then he realized that he was talking to himself. He wondered if he was schizophrenic. It reminded him of a song by Styx that said 'I'm schizophrenic, and so am I.' He didn't want to be schizophrenic. He closed his mouth tightly and stared at the road through the rain-covered windshield.

There were headlights behind him again. This time he was sure they were police lights. What would he do if the police knew it was him? He'd never been in jail. He wished he had stayed home and watched "All Star Wrestling". But, he had to go out. He was bored. Or was he aimless? He had to answer aimless. The car behind him turned.

The rain made the air conditioning in the car leave spots of moisture on the windshield that grew and made it hard for Joe to see. He knew if he turned it off, the car would fog up the way it did when you went parking with your date after the movie. So he left it on.

He pulled a cigarette out of his breast pocket, put it in his mouth, and pushed the lighter in. ZZ Top was on the radio, and at this point Joe thought the radio was his only friend. He lit the cigarette with two stop lights to go. He flicked his ashes onto the floor because his ash tray was jammed shut. The ashes floated to the ground like falling leaves from a tree and landed without a sound. He looked down and realized that he was letting ashes fall onto his new shoes. He would have to clean them off when he got home. He was turning onto his road. He forgot the turn signal. He felt bad. If someone was behind him, he could have caused an accident.

The T.V. was still on as he got out of the car. He was no longer bored. He had had enough activity that night to last a lifetime, or was it enough activity to lose him a lifetime? He hoped not.

He sat on the front porch to clean off his shoes.

My Name Isn't #2003641. It's Joe.

His cell was very monotonous and lifeless. He had a cot that was chained to the wall, a bedside table, and a toilet. Three walls were made of cement blocks and were painted 'fairy blue' as it was known to the prisoners. In prison the term 'fairy' didn't mean someone that was gay. Because, if that were the case, most of them would fall under that definition. No, to the prisoners, fairy meant weak. And if there was one thing that prisoners didn't want to be considered, it was weak.

The walls in the cell were interesting for the first few weeks though. The people in the cell before him had used it as a place to write on. Joe thought that it would be a good idea for somebody to write a book on prison graffiti. Hell, they'd done one on graffiti in the Big 10. The walls reminded Joe of the employee's bulletin board they'd had when he worked at Munch King. Now he worked for the state and this was not an employee board, it was an 'I'm bored and have nothing else to do' board. He wondered if he'd be able to work at Munch King again if he escaped.

He had counted the number of cement blocks that kept him in his 'room' many times. There were 420 of them. 140 on each of the three walls. He hadn't written anything on them yet, but he was thinking about it. He wanted his saying to be important and useful to other prisoners. His favorite thing on the wall was written by prisoner #980124. It said: 'Am I curious about being a homo? Yes, I'm curious. But I'm also curious about jumping off a cliff and I've never done that either.' It was strange and that was why Joe liked it.

The fourth wall was actually not a wall at all. It was a huge gate. This gate looked like the gates that people sometimes use to keep people from going in certain rooms of a house. They kept people out but they still showed what the room looked like. Joe's gate was not like that at all. It was there to keep him in. It could not be climbed, squeezed through, jumped over, dug under, or 'open says-a-me' opened. Joe had tried all of these things many times and the only thing that worked was a little black button that he did not have access to. Life was a bitch he thought. And God, he was bored here.

He was waiting for the day that he would be able to walk out of this cell and know that he would not have to come back. He was waiting for the day that he could go out to the store and buy himself another pair of Nike's. His were now almost a year old, and they looked like it.

He had to go to the bathroom. To be frank he had to 'pull out the brown banana' as he said. But he hated 'going' here. The toilet was in the corner of the room and the cells across the way could see him. At home it was nice to go to the bathroom because it was private. Here it was very much public. They laughed when someone grunted while on he pot. And the seat was always cold. It gave him goose bumps. Yes, he could hold it until everyone was asleep.

He stretched out on his cot and looked up to the corner where the wall meets the ceiling. In the middle of the back wall at the very top

was a bar-covered window the size of a small T.V. He wished he could watch T.V. He wished he was on the other side of the window. He fell asleep with his shoes on and dreamed about the hell he was going through.

The dream couldn't have been anything like the Hell he was going to.

### I'm Walking Out . . . I'm Going To Hell

"How was your last dinner in the shit hole, Joey?" asked Richard the prison cook. He was serving two life terms.

"Great," Joe answered. He didn't know what else to say. He didn't lie. The food was good, for prison food. He didn't know what to say because he couldn't believe he was never going to eat dinner with Rich again. Today he was really going to walk out of that prison cell and never return. He looked at the dinner plate in front of him. The few left over potatoes and cottage cheese with ketchup reminded him of a bleeding nose on newly fallen snow. He didn't know why. He liked ketchup on his cottage cheese. Richard Nixon ate it that way. The plate and the fork that he was given were plastic. He wasn't issued a knife, that would have been dangerous. Yes, the food was great, for prison food.

He got up from the dinner table and walked back to his cell. He had to stop twice and wait for a guard to push that magical button to open 'gates.' When he got to his cell he walked in and sat down.

He looked around the cell. He looked at the walls and counted the blocks one last time. 420. He hadn't made a mistake. He picked up his pencil from the floor and put it up to the wall. It was his last day and he still hadn't written anything on the walls. He spent the majority of his recreational time, which consisted of sitting and sleeping, thinking about what he would write when he left and he still wasn't sure. He wrote: Sept. 29, 1986 #2003641. Then he stopped.

He wasn't sure but the thought he heard them coming to get him. He heard the echo of a gate opening somewhere in the complex. He only had a few minutes left here so he wrote quickly: 'In my stay here I've learned that . . .' That what? Hell, he didn't know. What would he write? Was he going to choke at this point in his prison career? He hoped not.

He had always heard that when you got out of prison they gave you \$20 to start out with. He wondered if he was going to get \$20. He was, in a way, getting out of prison. He was sure he heard them coming now. He only had a few seconds. He looked down at his shoe string colored tennis shoes and remembered what they had looked like when they were new and shiny white. They had held up pretty good for two and three quarter years, though. He finished his words on the wall: the best shoes are NIKE'S.

"Joe," it was the warden and two guards. "It's time to go."

"Okay," Joe answered. The warden watched him carefully as he got up from the cot. Joe looked around the room and then down at his tennis shoes. He thought about his time here and how the times of going to the bathroom in public were now over. As he walked out of

the cell and down the hall for the last time he watched his feet and counted the cracks in the cement floor as he walked over them. One . . . two . . . three . . . step on a crack break your mother's back. He remembered doing that when he was growing up. Four . . . five . . . He remembered stealing the candy when he was little and how he never got caught. Six. He remembered the day he bought his tennis shoes and he remembered the night he was bored. He was sorry about the girl; the gun was an accident.

Yes, he knew. He knew, where he was going being bored was going to be a luxury.

### I Think I'll Have a Seat

The room was small. It took him 32 cracks to get here. It was painted 'fairy' blue like everything else in the prison. This would be the last room that he would be in while he was in prison. Nothing was in it other than the chair that very few people got the privilege to sit in. The chair was brown, ugly, had a large back and straps, and reminded Joe of an old time wheel chair. Or some sort of kinky sexual device. Joe could tell that it had just been dusted because around the posts of the back there were grayish-white areas that had been missed. They cleaned it for me, Joe thought with pride. They cleaned it for me.

There were windows on one side of the room. Behind the windows sat ten people that Joe had never seen before. He knew they were there as witnesses to this 'event.' Hell, he thought, some of them had probably bet each other on how long it would take. Ten seconds, 30 seconds, a minute or two. He sat down and looked at them. He smiled. No one smiled back so he flipped them off. He had always wanted to do that to people that did not acknowledge him, and now he had the chance. And besides, someone was going to make money from him in this 'event' so he could do whatever he wanted.

The guard put the straps around his arms and legs. What a seat belt, Joe thought. Maybe I should thank him for belting me. Belt someone. The way he must have looked Joe thought he would have been a good candidate for the star role in a science-fiction movie. The way he felt, he could have flipped this chair ten times and walked away. Unfortunately, he would never get that chance to walk away, or even flip the chair. The guard strapped his head in. I wonder how many blocks are in these walls? Another guard brought a bag over. Hey, no one has written on these walls yet. The bag was placed over Joe's head. Don't want the people to see the steam come out of my ears, Joe thought. The last thing he noticed were his shoes. God, were they good shoes. Hey, he thought, I'm really sorry about the girl.

"Pull the switch," Joe heard someone yell.

His toes wiggled and twitched in his shoes.