

# Mr. McGehee and Me

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MICHAEL PFIFENWALLER SAT BEHIND HIS DESK reading the morning paper. He struggled with the news he was reading. He reread the article to be sure the names were correct. As he finished, he laid the *Atlanta Journal* down in front of him, and he drifted back fifteen years where the article truly began.

Mr. McGehee walked around Bus 4 looking for obvious problems. Although this was his first year as a bus driver for the public school system, the walk-around had been routine for him for twenty-four years. Mr. McGehee looked the bus over as he did the Spitfire before crawling into the cockpit. Satisfied, he turned the key and the engine responded accordingly.

“I love the sound of a diesel engine,” he thought.

He sat for a moment waiting for the engine to warm up. He stared at nothing as he sat in his Fighter waiting for the dramatic signal from the flight officer. The action seemed like yesterday. His heart raced, anticipating the catapult. Before the ship could launch him from the steel deck, he returned to his bus.

The “ready” light lit just as the instructor last week said it would, but he was still apprehensive to put the forty-passenger bus into gear.

“The question is are *you* ‘ready,’ Mac?” He mumbled to himself rhetorically.

Some of the buses had already left. Not one of them enjoyed the walk-around check Bus 4 received. The gears slid neatly into place and, ready or not, Mac was ready.

Bus 4 exited the terminal’s parking lot on its first run of the year. Mr. McGehee had driven the route in his personal vehicle until he had it memorized, but not at this time of day. The sun filtered through the trees, blinding him for a moment as he pulled onto the rural route. He enjoyed the feeling of the early

morning sun and allowed himself to return to the catwalk that circles every aircraft career. He made it a point to take his morning coffee to a control box where he witnessed the sun slowly reveal herself over the horizon. The gentle breeze and the smell of the salt were his breakfast at sea.

In a moment of panic, Mr. McGehee turned his head right and then left and back again until he realized he had not missed his turn.

“Thank you, Lord,” was his response to every bit of good news.

Finding his right turn, he replaced the rural route for a dirt road. The trees were thick and kept the road as dark as it was three hours ago. A quarter of a mile further was his first pick up. The bus slowed and the image of the first passenger of his first solo flight appeared. The huge panel to his left lit up every button and its purpose. He looked them over until he found his target and just as indicated “red flashers” began flashing and the stop sign extended.

“By next week I’ll have these buttons memorized,” he thought. “I won’t even have to look,” he promised himself.

The eager passenger did not have to adjust his step right or left as the door folded open directly in front of him. Mr. McGehee looked down as the child looked up. Their eyes caught for a moment as they examined each other.

“What’s that on your back?” Mr. McGehee asked.

“My books,” came the reply with somewhat of a proud tone of voice.

The child lifted his foot as high as he could while trying not to allow the weight in his backpack pull him backwards to the ground. McGehee looked for the parents of the child to see if someone was coming to help him. A lady in a long pink robe with white fuzzy house slippers stood with arms folded opposite the bus, leaning slightly as if her body language could help her child. McGehee set the brake and stood up. He reached down his right hand. “Grab hold,” he commanded. The boy refused the help and managed to pull himself up with much twisting and turning.

“I’m in the third grade now. I can manage,” the boy informed his driver.

“I reckon you can,” McGehee said.

McGehee waited for the boy to sit. The child had his sights on the back row where the big kids sit, but he stopped half way, realizing the seats were hidden in the dark. McGehee forgot to turn the backlight on and was glad he did as the boy returned to front of the bus and sat.

With the boy situated, the red flashers stopped flashing and the stop sign returned. McGehee pulled off leaving the pink robe and white fuzzy slippers, engulfed in a cloud of road dust. McGehee felt guilty for smiling at the sight.

“My name’s Mr. McGehee. My friends call me Mac.” It seemed like a good introduction, but there was no reply. “I bet your name is Michael, and your last name begins with the letters P-f.” He dared not try pronouncing the last name. He memorized the names in order of the pickups, but there were a few last names he felt unsure of.

“My friends call me Luke.”

McGehee was thrilled to get a reply. He loved kids more than people his own age. While Luke wanted to seem older than he was, McGehee wanted to be accepted by the youth.

The second pickup were Dee Dee and Demona, also known as the D twins. The D twins were in the sixth grade. They talked about everybody as if they represented a gossip column. If there was a secret to be kept it needed to be kept from the D twins.

By the fifth pickup, the rural routes, courts, ways, drives, roads, and streets were awake. The fifth pickup interested McGehee the most. The other bus drivers had warned him about Blake Rogers. “He has yet to last more than a week on a school bus, due to write-ups for various bus infractions.”

“Good morning Blake Rogers, I’m Mac.”

“Yea, whatever, dude,” the tall thin boy replied as if life was a bother.

“Blake, that’s ‘Mr. Dude’ to you,” Mac insisted.

Mac saw the smile Blake was trying to hide. As he moved toward the back row, those who were sitting there quickly chose new seats a few rows up. Blake sat in the last row as if it were a sofa in his living room. He slouched down so low that Mac could only see the top of his baseball style hat in his rearview mirror.

Bus 4 arrived at the elementary school with laughter and signs of potential chaos. Two riders ignored Mac’s order to remain seated until the bus came to a complete stop. Mac pulled them aside before they exited.

“Do you like school?” Mac probed.

“Not really,” said one while the other shook his head in agreement.

“Then why are you so eager to get off the bus?” Mac reasoned. The two boys looked silly.

“I don’t want a child to get hurt following your example. Are we clear?”

“Yes sir,” replied the one while the other nodded compliantly. Blake saw the conversation and decided that Mr. Dude was cool. As Bus 4 pulled away from the elementary school, it was half empty and now on its way to the middle school and then the high school, where Blake was dropped off.

It took Mac five days of pickups before Luke grabbed Mac's hand for help. His hand got lost in Mac's huge grip. Luke trusted Mac's strength to pull him and his burden up the steps. The lady in the pink robe and white fluffy slippers stood with arms folded watching from the front porch of the house that was dimly lit.

Mac and Luke had an unspoken agreement that no girls, especially Katie "Goldie Locks" Brannon, were allowed to sit next to Luke. Katie liked Luke, but she made the mistake of treating him like one of her dolls. During the second week of pickups, Mac made an announcement to the entire bus that he wanted to keep "just one person in this seat" as he pointed to the seat where Luke sat, "just in case a policeman wants to ride with us." As Mac turned to take his seat, Luke gave him a third grade style wink. Mac winked back.

By mid-October there was no sign of the sun until half the pickups were finished. The weather showed indications of winter. Most of the leaves were yellow and many had begun to fall. Mac was moving a bit slower as he did his morning walk-around. His arthritis hurt, but he was determined to walk as natural as a man half his age despite the pain in his hips.

He was distracted this morning. His wife of fifty-four years was not doing well. She had been in remission for eight years and had been told that if there were no signs of cancer for eleven years there would be no more blood tests. She would be cancer free. The cancer had not only returned, but the news three months ago gave little hope they would see their fifty-fifth year together. On this particular cold October morning, Mac climbed up the bus steps with more effort than ever. He was tired. His wife couldn't sleep last night and she had trouble breathing. Mac spent the night in a chair next to their bed praying for Alice and ministering to her needs until she fell asleep. He woke with his right hand on her forearm. He concluded that he must have fallen asleep since he did wake up. He called the Hospice to let them know he was ready for their help.

Forty-five minutes later, he was sitting in the bus anticipating the "ready" light. There was no time for Morning Prayer. From the driver's seat he could see only what the headlights allowed. Daylight saving time was getting close. He drove a little slower than usual and finally Luke illumined on the side of the road. Mac forgot the routine he and Luke had every morning. Mac was so distant that he forgot to pull Luke up the bus steps.

As Luke reached the top of the steps he said, "hello," but Mac gave no response. His mind was on Alice. Luke wanted to say something, but he was new at this sort of thing. Mac looked very sad. Luke noticed that his hands looked wiggly.

The darker mornings had an effect on the bus. The children were quieter, maybe sleepier. Blake, however, entered with a “Hey Mr. Dude,” as he did every morning, following it up with a high five. Mac made a meager effort with his right hand but missed the tag. Blake walked backwards to the back of the bus signaling to Luke to come join him. Mac didn’t notice that Luke was half way to the back when he pulled off sending Luke to his knees as if his backpack had tackled him.

“Dude, what’s up with Mac?” Blake asked Luke. Luke situated himself for the second time. He was honored that he was sitting in back with Blake. He knew the others were looking at him.

“He looks real sad. He didn’t even say hello to me today!” Luke paused a moment to reflect then added, “And did you see how wiggly his hands are?” Blake nodded, although he didn’t notice that.

Blake said, “I don’t think he’s sick but something’s wrong. Let’s find out. My uncle knows one of the bus drivers. I’ll go to his bus right after school and see if he knows anything.”

“Let’s cheer ‘em up. I got lots of gummy bears. I’ll give him some,” Luke recommended.

“Yea, he will like that,” Blake said trying to humor him.

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“Is this Bus 4?” Luke demanded.

“Yes, it is. Let’s go. You’re holding up the line,” responded the substitute bus driver.

Luke struggled with the first step as he did at the start of the school year. The passengers were surprised that Mac was not driving them home from school. Every passenger missed Mac’s afternoon high fives and fun afternoon spirit. Even the D twins quieted for a moment. They noticed that Mac was different this morning and were now concerned for him since he was not driving them home. Most of the children asked, “where’s Mac” to the point of irritating the replacement driver. “How am I supposed to know? I don’t even know him,” he finally said.

Katie made it a point to sit with Luke. This concerned Luke. “Mac was so sad this morning,” Katie said with a motherly voice. “I just wanted to give him a big hug.” Luke wasn’t irritated that Katie was sitting next to him. He wanted to talk about Mac, too.

“I gave him ten gummy bears this morning,” Luke remembered. “I would

have given him more, but Blake made me give him five for letting me sit in the back.” Luke forgot that he wasn’t going to mention that last part.

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Mac sat on the bed, one leg stretched out under the blanket and the other supporting his weight from the floor. Alice laid flat on her back, up against her husband. Mac held her right hand in his with his left arm lying just above Alice’s head on the top of the pillow. Their bedroom was dimly lit.

“You are the love of my life.” Mac was hoping beyond hope that Alice could hear his final words. Her wrinkled face, framed by her white hair, showed no sign of coherence. The last three months had sped up the aging process, but to Mac she was the same as when he first saw her at the VA hospital in Denver.

Alice was a Navy nurse assigned to rehab at Fitzsimmons VA Hospital and to Lieutenant Charles McGehee. Mac had to bail out of his fighter. Although his parachute opened, he broke both legs during ejection. Mac’s confidence attracted Alice. To her he could do anything. Mac was at first attracted to Alice’s legs, but he didn’t tell her that until after they were married. Mac had to propose three times before she would accept. She would have accepted on the first proposal, but she like the attention so much that she remained “undecided and she’d have to think about it” until the third time. On top of that, Mac had to sign on a hospital napkin that he would survive the war before she finally agreed to marry him. Mac eagerly did so. Fifty-four years later, their union was coming to an end.

“Alice, remember that boy, Blake, I told you about? He’s beginning to open up to me. You were right in telling me not to ignore him, even though he’s rude to me. Anyway, he holds down a job stocking shelves at Red and White. He said his dad died in prison and his mother died shortly after he was born.” Mac paused for a moment to think what his last words to his beautiful Alice should be. He looked up and noticed the nurse peeking around the corner. She lifted her eyebrows in a wordless question. Mac shook his head indicating “not yet.”

“Alice, you were a good mom.” Speaking in past tense did not bother him like it did last week when he and Alice were talking over coffee on the patio. “I can see Little Robert sitting on your lap like it was yesterday. I’m so sorry I wasn’t there when he was born. I don’t blame you for not having another child. I know it’s not because you didn’t want another child. Little Robert’s waiting for you. You’ll see him soon. His four years with us were the greatest four years of our lives. It was painful sending him home to God. It is painful sending you home,

too. But . . .” Mac was falling apart. Tears dropped from his cheeks to Alice’s cheeks, “please tell Little Robert ‘hello’ for me. I’m glad you are going before me. . . I love you. . . I know that you love me.” Mac felt his wife’s hand squeeze his. His eyes widened with the response and he lifted her hand to his face. Mac chose his final words, “Goodbye Alice, I won’t be long.” Alice breathed a final sigh as if being relieved of her turmoil.

The Hospice nurse sitting in the living room silently observed Alice and Charles’ last moments together and made the necessary phone calls.

“Thank you Lord for the years you have given me with Alice. Thank you for taking her first. This hurts too bad. What do you have for me in my remaining years? I’ve done very little without her. Use me as you desire for Jesus’ sake.”

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The meeting was starting a few minutes late because Dr. Friesen, the principal, needed to settle an argument in the assistant principal’s office. Begging their pardon as he entered his office, Dr. Friesen took his seat and introduced, Mac to Miss Lofton. Miss Lofton was the head of the English department and acting guidance counselor of Normandy High School.

“He’s just like his father. I was his teacher back when he was in high school, too, ya know.” That didn’t surprise Mac. She seemed as cranky as she was old. She continued, “Mr. McGehee, Cameron Rogers was executed three years ago for killing two police officers during a drug bust!” Mac knew Blake’s father died in prison, but he didn’t know the circumstances. “The apple doesn’t fall from the tree,” she concluded.

“Didn’t Blake’s mother die giving birth to Blake?” Mac said as if trying to figure out a puzzle.

“That’s right, her name was Cindy. She was one of my students also. She was such a sweet girl. I could never understand what she saw in Cam.”

“I believe there is some of Cindy in Blake as well, just as that apple saying goes, wouldn’t you say, Dr. Friesen?” Mac added. Dr. Friesen sat wordless letting the two work through the issues.

“With who was he staying?” Mac asked.

“It is not ‘who,’ Mr. McGehee, it is ‘whom,’ ‘with whom was he staying?’ I don’t know. That would be the State’s problem,” Miss Lofton corrected. “Look, Mr. McGehee, Blake sits in the back of the room totally despondent. He has turned in two homework assignments this semester and is failing the class. If we

don't move him into the military alternative school, he's sure to drop out of school altogether."

Mac pressed on, "What were his SAT scores?"

"Let me see," Miss Lofton flipped papers in the file she held on her lap. "Near perfect!" She said doubting the numbers. "1530 is his total score. The breakdown. . . 800 in math and 730 in English and writing skills." The scores pushed the old English teacher back in her chair as she tried to reason the numbers.

"Thank you Miss Lofton," the principal said in his "You may leave now" tone voice that all his staff was familiar with. She shook Mac's hand politely. "I really do care about him, but I see no other alternative for him."

As the door closed behind Miss Lofton, Mac also stood to shake the principal's hand. "Dr. Friesen, do you believe in life after death?" Mac was mysteriously leading to something.

"Are you referring to Blake or Blake's father?" Dr. Friesen replied. Mac didn't respond to the question. Nor did he ask for his opinion on Blake. Mac had already made up his mind. He thanked the Headmaster for his time and then departed.

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"Why aren't you sitting in the back today?" came a snotty as possible comment from one of the D twins. The comment, as rude as it sounded, alerted Luke to the fact that Blake was not yet on the bus. Luke wrenched his neck in both directions to look for Blake but he was not present. He was sure that Blake rode this morning.

"Hey, we can't leave yet. Blake's not on the bus," Luke announced.

"You snooze, you lose," the substitute replied. "I can't wait any longer."

As the bus doors closed, the last row was immediately filled with foreigners. Luke wanted to tell them all to "Get out of Blake's seat!" He'd already been talked to rudely about the back row; he wasn't about to chance another ridiculing. Besides, what could a third grader do about it?

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Blake sat by himself on a cot that folded out from the wall. Jail food wasn't as bad as he imagined it to be. He set the dinner tray aside and picked up a novel that one of the guards allowed him to pick earlier from a pile on a cart. He could hear



people talking about him from down the hall. The conversation echoed between the concrete walls and steel bars.

“Well, he is seventeen years old,” one voice said sternly.

“Yes, but this is his first time being incarcerated and remember he’s only a junior in high school. Let’s work with him. Let’s try to help him.” Blake knew that voice from somewhere but the severe echo made it difficult to put a face with it. He laid the book aside and tilted his head to concentrate on the conversation.

The argument continued: “Okay, so we let him go, who will he stay with? His uncle who was his guardian has been arrested, not only for possession but also with intent to distribute to a minor! He’ll do at least fifteen years, hopefully more.”

“That’s ‘with whom will he stay?’ Not ‘who’.” Mac corrected.

“Whatever. Blake was right there when the sale was being made.”

“No!” Mac argued. “He was in the car waiting for his uncle to return. He may not have even known the sale was being made! He can stay with me.”

With that Blake approached the bars. “Who said that?” he mumbled. He put his left ear between two bars. “Keep talking,” he said just loudly enough that the inmate across from him could hear.

“Yea right! A seventeen-year-old juvenile delinquent under the supervision of a seventy-five year old school bus driver. Only a judge could approve such a thing.”

“With your urging he might . . . I mean if you suggest it, the idea stands a chance. What do you have to lose? You’re the D.A. in this area.” Mac reminded him. The attorney loved a good debate.

“My re-election for one thing. If this boy screws up again. . . .”

“But if he succeeds, you would be credited a hero in the eyes of the voters.” The statement quieted the District Attorney. Mac knew he was gaining some ground.

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“Blake Rogers . . .” Blake stood immediately in response to his name. “No need to stand, Blake. This is not a hearing. Just relax. I want to tell you your situation and ask you some questions.” Blake expected the judge to be in a black robe. His casual attire caught him off guard. He expected to be standing before a huge judgeline desk looking up at some sort of god figure. Instead, he sat in a room full of books with expensive looking chairs forming a half circle in front of the judge’s large desk. It was just he and the judge.

“Your uncle is being charged with a serious crime, Blake. The question is whether or not to charge you as well. This State is within the boundary of charging you because you were present when your uncle attempted to sell cocaine to students at your high school. Some of the students saw you.” The judge waited for a response. Blake remained quiet.

“Did you know that your uncle was selling to minors?” The judge finally asked.

“He didn’t tell me he was, and I didn’t ask him.” There was a long pause. The judge had heard enough of the lawyer’s jibber-jabber; he wanted to hear from Blake.

“I didn’t want to know if he was selling. If I knew, then I would be accountable and taken away . . . and if he got caught, I’d be taken away. I was hoping there would be no trouble until after I finished high school. Then I would be on my own. I have nowhere to go. My father . . . .” Blake wasn’t sure if revealing his father’s story would help or hurt his situation.

“I know all about your father. Your mother died shortly after you were born. . . .”

Before the judge could finish Blake began, “The whole world knows about my father. The teachers treat me different. It’s as if they want me to be like him. Did you know that one of the police officers my father killed has a niece teaching at my high school?” With that the judge looked concerned.

“Blake, what are your dreams? What is it that *you* would like to become?” The judge picked up a pen and drew an oval shaped circled on the right side of the yellow pad resting on the desk. Then on the left side he made an ‘x’. “This ‘x’ is you right now; the oval is you ten years from now. If you could do anything or reach any reasonable goal in life, what would it be?” The judge drew a very slow path with his pen from the ‘x’ to the oval. Then, he tapped the circle three times for emphasis.

Blake thought about the question and began to grin before he began to speak. Blake’s grin evolved into a smile affecting the judge who began to smile with him.

“A police officer, your honor,” Blake said half laughing. The answer combined with the giggle sent the judge laughing. The judge’s response did not offend Blake. He knew why he was laughing. They took their time regaining their composure.

“You’re not trying to make up for your father’s crime, are you?”

“At first, I guess that was the reason. But when I talked to our school’s resource officer, Officer Tony, I really thought that it would be a cool job,” Blake insisted. “I’ve been interested ever since.”

“Have you ever used illegal drugs?”

“No sir, never,” Blake said without hesitation. “My daddy killed because of drugs and now he’s dead because of them. Just before he died, he made me promise never to use them and to be good like my momma was.” Blake succeeded in fighting back tears.

“I have just one question, Blake.” The judge moved out from behind his shiny oak desk. After repositioning a chair close to Blake he sat down. Leaning forward to position his elbows on his knees, he folded his hands together, “Would you consider living with Mr. McGehee, at least until you finish high school?”

“You mean Mac!” Blake said with a surprised voice. The judge nodded. Blake did not ask what the alternative was. Last week his English teacher warned him that he was headed to alternative school. That meant uniforms, marching, washing dishes, and inspections. As a result, whenever his teacher called him to the front, he would march up to her desk and do an about face before returning to his seat.

“Was this Mac’s idea?” Blake asked cautiously.

“Yes it was, and I agree with it. I don’t think you’ve been given a fair chance. You’ve been riding on the coattails of your father. Your uncle lives as your guardian in the house that belongs to you.”

“Yes, I would like to live with Mac, that is . . . I mean, I’d like to have Mac, uh, Mr. McGehee that is, as my guardian.”

“This decision is contingent on certain conditions.”

“What does contingent mean?” Blake asked.

“Simply put, you screw up at school or with the law and you’re out of there, and you become property of the State. Are we clear on this?” The judge said sternly.

“Yes sir,” Blake agreed. With that the judge reached over the papers on his desk to push a button and called for Mac and an attorney to come into the Judge’s Chambers.

There were no hugs or shaking hands, though it seemed to everyone that there should be some sort of manly response to the situation. Neither Mac nor Blake knew how to approach each other. As all parties sat in their chairs, Mac broke the awkwardness with a high five to Blake, who eagerly passed it on to the judge, who felt good about receiving it. The attorney just smiled but was left out of it. For the next twenty minutes the judge went over the terms and many papers were signed.

As the foursome reached the door the judge said, "Blake, there's something you should know. Your grandfather Kramer left you his estate. When you turn twenty-one, you are entitled to it. Mac will go over this with you in the days ahead."

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Blake felt very uncomfortable entering Mac's place. It was more like a sanctuary than any house he'd been in. Everything was neat and orderly. He was afraid that he would break something. He whispered when he talked as if he was in the waiting room at the doctor's office.

"There's no need to whisper, unless you have a friend over before I wake up in the morning. But I doubt you'll get up before me. Look around and make yourself at home. The refrigerator is yours, the sofa is yours, everything is yours! The only thing off limits is my bedroom, and your bedroom is off limits to me. Come, I'll show you to your room." The stairs carried the two up until they reached the large room over the garage.

"This used to be our son Robert's room. It's yours now." It took Mac two days to clear out all the items from the room. He carefully boxed and labeled everything. Except for cleaning, the room remained untouched since he died 36 years ago. Blake walked over to the window that overlooked the neighborhood street running in front of the house. He liked the room.

Mac said, "There are only a few rules in this house. One of those is attending Sunday morning services."

"I've never been in a church building before," Blake said. "But I'd like to see what goes on inside there."

After returning the way they came, Blake took his time looking at all the pictures on the walls.

"I see several pictures of this little boy. Who is he?"

"His name was Robert. Alice, my wife, called him Little Robert," Mac explained, waiting for the next obvious question.

"He's young in all of the pictures. Why aren't there any high school pictures or pictures of him older?" Blake wondered.

Mac had already prepared himself for the question. "He died of cancer when he was four. He would be forty-three years old now."

"I'm sorry, Mac," Blake said.

Blake continued to look around. Some of the hangings were not pictures. There was a Bible verse, military ribbons and medals, and an old looking bayonet inside a glass frame.

“Mac, can you explain this piece? I can barely make it out.”

I hereby promise Alice Rice that I will survive Vietnam so that  
I can marry her.

Signed *Charles McGehee*

“I’ll tell you about Alice one of these days. There are a lot of stories on these walls. Do you have any pictures you want to hang up?” Mac asked.

“Not yet . . . Well, I do have one of my mom and dad before I was born.”

“Well let’s get a frame for it and hang it!” Mac replied.

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The school year began as the previous school years had. The halls were filled with confusion and laughter, and the front office was jammed with students. Most teachers were committed to last minute class changes in their rooms while some were in the halls assisting students with room locations. Mr. Pfifenwaller was one of the few teachers who sat relaxed in their room. He was held fast to the “International News” section on inside cover of the *Atlanta Journal*. The headlines read:

*Missionary couple killed in Columbia, South America*

Blake and Elaine Rogers, who have served as missionaries with “Regions Beyond” for sixteen years, are confirmed dead. It has been reported that terrorists kidnapped and killed the American couple just before sunrise. Their two children, Charles age ten, and Alice age five were unharmed. “The details are sketchy as the Colombian government continues to investigate,” the US Ambassador told reporters.

The *Atlanta Journal*, now dotted with tears, lay flat on the desk before the stunned teacher.

“Is this English 101?” Asked a student sticking her head in the door just to be sure. Mr. Pfifenwaller didn’t hear the question at first but seemed to wake up in his own classroom.

“Excuse me, what?” he quickly responded.

“Are you Mr. . . .?”

“You can call me Mr. Wall.” He said trying to ease the embarrassment of the student. With that, the two-minute bell warned students that their summer break was ending. Students reluctantly filtered into the classroom until the final bell ushered in the school year. Mr. Wall quickly counted the number of students and realized there was one student absent. As he looked down the list of the names the classroom door flew open. With a look of too much confidence the last student entered.

“You must be Cory. Welcome to English 101,” Mr. Wall said.

“Yeah, whatever, dude,” Cory replied.

“Cory, that’s ‘Mr. Dude’ to you,” Mr. Wall replied.