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Things That Go Bump In The Night

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A water hose lay coiled by the hydrant at the side of the barn. I dragged it toward the open door, but it didn't reach. Remembering another hose on the lawn, I ran to the house and disconnected the hose without assistance, a task I couldn't accomplish the day before. I raced back to the barn with the hose.

The fire had spread to the stacked bales. "I think we better get help," I said as Glade grabbed the hose. He looked at me with eyes wide and startled. He feared our grandfather more than the fire.

"He'll skin me alive. Tell him you lit the fire. He won't whip you."

I met Weaver on my way back to the house. He was running toward the barn. "Tell Stella to call the fire department!" he yelled before I could explain.

"Call the fire department! Glade didn't do it, but the barn's on fire," I threw open the kitchen door. The men sprang toward me. I stepped aside to avoid their heavy workboots.

"You stay right here," Grandmother commanded as she cranked the phone on the wall. "Hello, give me the Fire Department. Fire Department? This is Mrs. Weaver Myers. Our barn is on fire. That's right. One mile north and a quarter west of the Washita River bridge. Please hurry."

"Grandmother, I can help! I want to help!"

"You have helped enough for one day. Stay right here where I can see you. Yes, that's right. Weaver Myers. North and west. Thank you." She hung up the receiver. "Now let me think. They will need more hose at the barn."

"I already took it," I said. She looked at me.

"We'll get the gunny sacks from the shop then." I didn't understand but decided now was not the time to ask for explanations.

Kay went with us to the shop by the back door. She looked at me with pity as we saw the flames coming out

the wide door of the haybarn. Smaller tongues of fire were licking from the vent on the top of the roof. My dad and uncle had hooked a plow to the tractor and were plowing close to the barn.

"Is it going to burn up? We didn't mean to burn it up."

"Here, wet these at the hydrant in the yard."

I could see the fire truck with its lights flashing as it drove across the bridge. It raced down the road to the corner with a cloud of dust raising behind it. I thought of the Lone Ranger. It pulled into the yard before I had saturated the last burlap bag with water. A neighbor followed in his truck.

Two more pickups entered the yard. Grandmother ran to the first one and threw the wet sacks in the back. Then she led me by the hand to the porch. Some of the men loaded hay onto the trucks from the north end of the barn while others beat the flames with the dampened sacks. The south end blazed steadily. I could see Wade beating furiously with a heavy sack. I envied his part in the action.

As we watched, the south end of the barn crumbled. The pickups pulled away from the opposite end at the same time. The men stood back as the fire truck pumped an inadequate stream on the blaze.

I didn't see Glade until school started that fall. He didn't want to talk about the whipping. Kay said it was worse than the one he got for spraying oil all over the shop last year with the new oil can. Grandmother never did bring up the subject of the barn with me, and I didn't feel inclined to do so myself.

They didn't take the trip to see my aunt in California that Christmas. Weaver had little time to let me sit behind him and comb his hair. In fact, I don't believe I ever did that again. By the time he had time to relax that winter, I was too big and too embarrassed.

— CHARIVARI or SHIVAREE — a significant slice of Western Oklahoma history —

Things That Go Bump In The Night

— by Kerri Beaman and Senea Morris



A shivaree — we explain to confirmed city dwellers — is a commotion, a series of rude noises, a small riot staged outside the bedroom window of newlyweds. The COMPREHENSIVE ETYMOLOGICAL DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE traces the word *shivaree* to the French and Latin translation which means heaviness in the head. Indeed, all this commotion outside the newlyweds' bedroom window would produce a heavy head or a headache. Bells, firecrackers, pots, and pans were all used to wake the newly married couple on their wedding night. In a personal interview Cedric Crink, travel consultant at Southwestern Oklahoma State University, stated, "Married couples of the early 1900's usually expected to be shivareed and they always would make sure to have refreshments the first and second night of their marriage." Refreshments would be anything from candy to cigars. This practice was usually found in rural areas where the

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couple would be staying at home on their wedding night. "Back then people didn't have the money to go on a honeymoon, and they also didn't have the transportation." Mr. Crink also added that motels were far and few between and that only the bigger cities had them. This may be the reason that the practice of having a shivaree for newlyweds has died out. Now couples whisk away to exotic honeymoons far from their homes. Decorating the cars and chasing the couple out of town may be all that remains of the old custom of a shivaree.

The performance of a shivaree cannot be pinpointed to any one particular area of the world because it was exercised in both the Western and Eastern Hemispheres. Since the word can be traced back to the Latin language, perhaps the idea of a shivaree could be traced even further back to the very first wedding ceremony. Even though the custom cannot be secluded to one specific area, we can say that this custom occurred mainly in the rural areas of the world because in the larger cities the practice would have disturbed the peace.

There are several different ways in which the shivareeing of the newlywed couple could take place. Mostly the pranks played upon the couple depended on the imagination and the mischievousness of the pranksters' minds.

For example, Ramon and Anna Samotts, immigrants from Ukraine, had several different "gags" pulled on them after their marriage ceremony which took place in the 1900's. The gagsters kidnapped the bride from the wedding reception and hustled her off to a "hidden" location so the groom had to "hunt" for his new bride. When Ramon found his bride, the instigators of the "kidnapping" then proceeded to parade them through the surrounding neighborhood on a haywagon which was drawn by plowhorses. Thus, the episode announced the news of their marriage to all the unknowing residents in a manner that had the same effects as that of the town crier spreading his news.

Howard and Eva Heath were married in 1945 in Michigan and were shivareed in a way similar to that of Ramon and Anna Samotts, Eva's parents. This time people kidnapped Eva from the reception that followed the wedding ceremony as was done at the Samotts' shivaree ritual. However, Eva was returned to the church after an hour because the groom had anticipated the prank and was following the pranksters through the town and outlying areas in his own car. Since this

stunt didn't go off as was expected, the townspeople waited and let a week go by before they tried a new approach. This time they caught the couple by surprise late at night. The Heaths were paraded around the countryside, seated on folding chairs in the back of a manure spreader, which was pulled by a tractor. Amidst the jeers and uproar of the neighbors, the Heaths noticed that their particular means of transportation that night had been painted with the nickname of the "Honeywagon." The whooping, shouts, and gun blasts of the crowd advertised their joining to the countryside in a very obvious way.

Another example of an old-fashioned Western shivaree was shown in the musical play OKLAHOMA. Here wagons and surreys filled with the town's men surrounded the newlywedded couple's

The entire idea of a shivaree was to create as much commotion as humanly possible.

house and shot their guns and clanged pots and pans until the couple came outside. Then the couple was driven amidst the loud cheers, whoops and gun blasts throughout the countryside to advertise their joining.

In Iowa the practice of a shivaree was slightly altered. Many times the crowds would even go to the extent of tarring and feathering the married couple and then parading them throughout the town's streets. The procession was usually led by someone playing a loud instrument, and torches lighted the pathway of the instigators. The couple may have been in a wagon pulled by horses, in a manure wagon, or even pushed throughout the streets in wheelbarrows. The main goal was to cause as much commotion as possible and to broadcast the couple's marriage to as many people in as loud and uproarious way as possible. Usually the ladies would think of plots to perform on the groom and the men would handle the commotion involved with "initiating" the new bride. As the years passed, more and more schemes were thought up so that the pranksters could come up with the most elaborate shivaree of them all.

The newlyweds in the rural areas soon learned to try to avoid the shivaree, so they would either sneak out of town unnoticed or anticipate every move that some plotters might make. A very good example of this occurred in 1935 near

Bridgewater, Iowa. Wayne and Minnie Beaman outsmarted their shivaree hosts by letting the townspeople think they were leaving in their car. Instead they went to Minnie's parent's home and while the townspeople were waiting for them to sneak around to Wayne's car, which they were watching closely, Wayne and Minnie sped away in a wagon which took them a few miles to another car that they had hidden.

Nowadays the idea of a shivaree is basically the decorating of the "getaway" car, tampering with the suitcases and chasing the couple out of town. The instigators of these have fun, but the couple also shares in the fun by trying to outsmart any maneuvers that might come up.

Various schemes can be performed on the car, depending on the extremes the people are willing to go to. For example, someone may be satisfied with merely shaving-creaming the outside, placing streamers, cans and balloons all over the car and chasing the couple around. Others may go to the extent of smearing vaseline on the windshield wipers, the steering wheel, and the other knobs in the interior plus stuffing the inside with newspaper or confetti, either putting rocks in the hubcaps or taking the tires off the car and putting it on blocks, putting cheese in the exhaust pipe, placing twigs and grass all under the hood and disconnecting the battery leads and spark plugs and any other devilish prank that can be devised to hamper the speedy getaway of the couple. Another thing that is known to happen occasionally is to hide the couple's car or to hide the car keys.

People also love to tamper with the suitcases of the newlyweds. The entire wardrobe can be removed or maybe only the underclothes will be left. Both things will leave the couple with a very limited wardrobe to choose from. Also pranksters may sew the sleeves of the shirts together or socks and pants may be filled with rice and confetti.

The entire idea of a shivaree was to create as much commotion as humanly possible to publicize the newlywedded couple's marriage status. However, the idea of sneaking away unnoticed to privately spend time together soon became the goal of the new couple. The pranks pulled on newlyweds are still practiced today mostly for fun, so although the gun shooting, fireworks, and "kidnapping" that were common in earlier times are done away with, the commotion and distracting gimmicks surrounding the custom of a shivaree are still alive. These pranks will probably maintain their usage as long as people are still getting married.