

Just Write

Gloucester County Library System

Logan Township Branch Writers' Group

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CLOTHING CRISIS

Do you have any idea how long it takes to make linen? Have you thought through the creation process of the wool garment you wear? It takes at least a year to go from seed to slacks, from sheep to socks.

When Adam and Eve first felt the need for a covering, they were in a hurry. There were sheep which could have been shorn, flax growing for the reaping. They could have asked God in their walk in the cool of the evening garden how to begin, what to do to make clothing.

Sin's entrance into the idyllic garden caused a sense of need, a brand new and very unpleasant feeling. The sense of need also brought a type of panic, of rush. Quickly, they must have looked around and grabbed the first item large enough to serve to cover what suddenly seemed exposed. Even then, they also hid, hid from the very One Who sees all and everywhere.

When God came to visit, calling to Adam, He had no need to search. He knew all. Adam's new experience of shame couldn't be covered by his own work. His hand had given up its purity, lost its power, when he gave it over to God's enemy and his own by rank disobedience.

God's answer echoes down through all ages until now; "death" was added to life's vocabulary, and unspeakably horrific, "bloodshed". Only God, Who gave human life, knew how and why it must be reclaimed by shed blood. Much later, the writer to the Hebrews told us, "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin." The life is in the blood.

Until Adam's desire for the forbidden had overridden his love for his Maker, there had been only contentment, peace, unity, life. He had no definition for "death". Now, he received what had been cunningly promised, the knowledge of good and evil.

Some scientists want a "big bang". Well, here is the biggest BANG for all time; everything good, short of God, Himself, came crashing to an end!

Jane Harre

Wise's Gardeners Save Petersburg: June 15, 1864

Part III (Continued from *Just Write*, July 2018)

By Ben Carlton

On 3 May 1864 Wise's Brigade was ordered to return to the Old Dominion state. After seven futile months spent mostly on James Island in the Charleston defenses, the Virginians were leaving South Carolina and returning home to defend their native state. Wise would continue under General Beauregard, who had been given command of the military department covering North Carolina to Virginia, south of the James River.

While in transit on the Weldon to Petersburg Railroad, after crossing the Virginia state line, Colonel Page was ordered to detrain the brigade at Hicksford, and send Colonel Tabb with the 59th Virginia ahead along with two companies of the 26th regiment to protect the Nottaway Railroad bridge against marauding Federal cavalry. Union General August Kautz had recently set off from Portsmouth with 3,000 troopers on a raid to disrupt the transfer of southern reinforcements to Richmond. Kautz met Tabb's little force at the Nottaway bridge crossing. Despite a valiant defense, the Federals succeeded in setting the bridge afire after the outnumbered Rebels were forced to fall back to an old earthwork 300 yards north of the river. Through a maelstrom of Yankee bullets, Major P. H. Fitzhugh and 20 volunteers of the 26th tried to put out the flames, but by then, the fire had totally engulfed the wooden trestle. Seeing it collapse into the swirling waters below, General Kautz reported he gathered up his casualties and rode on, leaving Wise's men "to guard where the bridge had been."

After failing to save the bridge, Wise's Brigade boarded the cars and arrived at Petersburg on 10 May, but was soon marching north along the Richmond Turnpike to the Swift Creek defenses. There General James Martin's Brigade of North Carolinians joined them. The two brigades fell in under the command of Major General Chase Whiting, whom Beauregard had left in charge at Petersburg, while he confronted Major General Ben Butler's Union army advancing toward Richmond from the Bermuda Hundred peninsula. The aggressive Beauregard planned to launch an attack from the Drewry's Bluff fortifications against Butler's force, driving the enemy south as Whiting simultaneously attacked the federal flank and rear. At sunrise on 16 May Whiting led Wise's and Martin's brigades from Swift Creek to Port Walthall Junction as federal skirmishers harried the advance. After crossing a creek and deploying for battle "there was a sharp fight for an hour or two," with Butler's rear guard. At about this time, Whiting, who was ill, appeared to have lost his nerve. Fearing that Petersburg would be left undefended if his small force were lured too far from the city, he ordered a withdrawal. Meanwhile, Beauregard was driving Butler back to his entrenchments at Bermuda Hundred, but Whiting's timidity had squandered an opportunity to cut off the federal retreat. General Wise was so incensed he accused Whiting of drunkenness. Whiting, citing poor health, asked to be relieved.

Wise's men suffered 30 casualties in the skirmish at Port Walthall Junction. More losses would follow as the Brigade joined Beauregard's army in the Howlett line to keep Butler "bottled up" at Bermuda Hundred. Before daybreak on 20 May, Wise's Brigade charged the Yankee breastworks in their immediate front, taking a portion of the federal line near Ashton Creek. A soldier of the 34th Virginia (the 4th Heavy Artillery had been re-designated as infantry) remembered that as the Confederates charged, Federal troops "fired over their heads and the

closer the Virginians came, the higher the enemy seemed to aim." Wise's Brigade could now claim with justification that they had truly been *under fire*.

While Wise's troops continued to help hold the line against Butler, General Wise and the 46th were detached and ordered to Petersburg. Wise had been appointed commander of the First Military District, Department of North Carolina and Southern Virginia. The title sounded impressive, but the real intention of the order was probably to remove Wise from command in the field. In his absence, Colonel Page commanded the rest of the brigade still in the trenches along the Howlett line.

Soon after Wise established headquarters at Petersburg, a 5,000-man force of cavalry and infantry led by General Quincy A. Gilmore attacked the Cockade City on 9 June. With just his own 46th, two companies of artillery, and the old men and boys of the Petersburg Home Guard, Wise was considerably outnumbered – fielding only about 1,000 men. Desperate for more troops, Wise recruited hospital patients well enough to shoulder a musket, and released prisoners from the jail and guardhouses to form two companies of what he called his "Patients and Penitents." Fortunately for the Confederates, Gilmore was so intimidated by the apparent strength of the Dimmock Line, he somehow failed to notice how few defenders Wise had. After a few piecemeal and uncoordinated assaults, Gilmore aborted his raid, withdrawing to the safety of Union lines.

After this close call, Wise demanded reinforcements. On 11 June General Beauregard ordered the 26th and 34th regiments to Petersburg along with the small cavalry command of General James Dearing. The next day, Grant began to shift his army to the south side of the James. The stage was now set for the desperate and unequal contest for Petersburg.

Firing was audible to Wise's troops camped outside Petersburg early on the morning of 15 June. It was coming from the northeast out along the City Point Road where Dearing's cavalry and artillery battery of Captain Ned Graham were contesting the advance of Smith's three federal divisions about two miles from the city. This delaying action over the woodlots and plowed fields of Baylor's farm bought time for Wise to arrange his thin line of defense. Wise placed his 26th Virginia on the left, stretched from Battery 1 on the Appomattox River to Battery 7. On their right, the 46th occupied the line from Batteries 8 to 13. The 34th Virginia held Battery 14 through Battery 18, where the Dimmock line curved westward. From this point on, until the return of Dearing's horsemen, the line was vacant. Only the eastern four miles of the nearly 10 miles of trenches were manned by the Confederates.

At approximately 9:30 a.m., Smith's divisions from the Federal Army of the James began to form up in the woods in front of the Petersburg earthworks after finally flanking Dearing's cavalry, capturing one of Graham's field pieces in the process. From his headquarters at Dunlap's house on Swift Creek, four miles north of town, Beauregard received word that Union forces were menacing Petersburg. He immediately telegraphed Richmond that Grant's army was in force south of James River. General Lee remained unconvinced but, nevertheless, ordered Hoke's division from Drewry's Bluff to Petersburg. By midmorning, Beauregard wrote, "...Skirmishing had assumed very alarming proportions." He implored Wise "to hold on at all hazards." Help was on the way. But the promised reinforcements were not expected to arrive before nightfall, and General Wise was once again called upon to save Petersburg with only the troops at hand – a scratch force consisting of his own brigade, the 64th Georgia Regiment,

Hood's Battalion of 2nd class militia, Major Batte's 44th Virginia Battalion, Major Archer's militia, Dearing's cavalry, and several artillery batteries.

As Smith conducted a careful and time-consuming personal reconnaissance of the Rebel lines, a deadly crossfire from the Confederate batteries continued to hold the Federals at bay. (One Rebel gunner recorded firing "225 rounds of shell at the enemy during the day from Battery No. 3.") Smith had witnessed his corps slaughtered in front of less formidable works at Cold Harbor, and he was not about to rush his men headlong into a frontal assault and another bloody repulse.

At about 1:00 p.m., Wise's line was being severely pressed at the center. Sergeant Robert Hicks of the 34th Virginia wrote, "They shelled us and ained [sic] to charge our works but was repulsed as weak as our line was...." The Thirty-fourth's skirmishers, under Colonel Goode, had been driven back from their rifle pits. The Virginians charged and retook the line, only to be chased out a second time by the Yankee skirmishers. Wise wrote that the enemy was driven out yet again, "and when they advanced the third time upon the pits the whole regiment leaped the parapets and gloriously repulsed them." But Goode's men chased the Federals too far. Finding themselves facing two divisions of Federals drawn up in line of battle, they beat a hasty retreat. Wise closed his lines from the right to support the Thirty-fourth, while sending Hood's Battalion to reinforce Colonel Page and the Twenty-sixth.

Another Federal reconnaissance in force threatened the left of Wise's line held by the Twenty-sixth. To the inexperienced Virginians, the reconnaissance appeared to be a determined attack as Federal skirmishers gained ground, dodging "forward from stump to stump, and from log to log" across the cleared expanse in front of the works. In their front, heavy skirmishing continued throughout the long, hot afternoon. Meanwhile over on the right of Wise's line, Kautz's Federal cavalry had been repulsed by Confederate artillery fire after the troopers had used up nearly all of their ammunition.

Smith finally concluded his extensive reconnaissance around 3:00 p.m. but spent another two hours devising a plan of attack with his division commanders. Smith recognized that the paucity of Rebel defenders made the Dimmock line less formidable than it appeared. He decided to attack with a heavy line of skirmishers instead of charging into the teeth of the guns in a traditional line of battle. Smith had also discovered a deep ravine between Batteries 6 and 7 that would afford some measure of cover for his infantry. Smith planned the attack for 5:00 p.m., but was further delayed when it was discovered that all of the artillery horses had been taken to the rear for watering. The animals had to be brought back and harnessed to the guns.

The sun was just setting when three Union batteries galloped up and opened fire on Battery 5. But within 20 minutes, Wise's batteries, firing from fixed positions with preset ranges, drove off the Union gunners. Instead of softening up the Rebels, the Union artillery barrage only served to announce that a full-scale assault was imminent. Finally, at around 7:00 p.m., two of Smith's divisions rolled forward to attack.

[To be continued in the next edition of *Just Write*.]

VACUUM VERSUS SEWING MACHINE

By Caroline Kalfas

My sewing machine jammed when I was about two inches shy of finishing my project.

I tinkered with the knobs and presser foot. I re-threaded the machine, turned the power off and on, and repeated the checklist. Eventually, I conceded that the problem needed an expert.

When I approached the counter at my small town repair shop, a quiet and dainty woman with short, permed hair was ahead of me. She presented a sewing machine older than mine and a much nicer vacuum than the one in my closet to the repairman. Both of her appliances needed fixing.

We stood and watched as the worker took charge of the machines.

“I don’t know which is worse, going without a sewing machine or going without a vacuum,” I said, trying to make conversation while we waited for the diagnosis of her products.

She shrugged without an answer.

Deep down, I knew. Going without the sewing machine would be much worse than losing access to the vacuum.

I loathe my vacuum cleaner. The operator needs to lift weights regularly to carry the awkward, upright machine up and down the stairs and to glide its brush roller from room to room and back and forth across the carpets. The electric cord is too short and constantly jumps from the wall outlet in the middle of a job. And dealing with the attachments and hose requires a crash course in engineering.

But I like my portable sewing machine. The stitching device has personality. She smacks when she runs, like she’s chewing on potato chips or carrots, depending on the stitch lengths

and settings. The sound sometimes startles others at group sew. But I don't hear a thing when I press the pedal. I'm too busy concentrating on feeding my material straight across the needle plate and monitoring the quality of my stitching.

If my efficient and loyal stitcher roars louder than my annoying, high-decibel vacuum, that's fine with me because the sewing machine can get the job done. My vacuum, on the other hand, leaves dirt behind no matter how much unwanted dust she scoops up.

I would give away my cell phone, washing machine, central air-conditioning, and maybe my car before I would part with my simple sewing machine. The gadget turns fabric into useful clothing, blankets, and collages of art; whereas, my vacuum turns dirt into nothing but a matted, dusty glob of filth to deposit into the trash can. I'm glad to get the mess off the floor, but let's be real. The vacuum picks up most but not all of the dirt. The machine remains an inefficient, yet necessary contraption for tackling proper housework.

The repairman inspected the vacuum belonging to my new wait-in-line friend. Then he scrutinized her sewing machine. He unscrewed parts and re-tightened them. He used a cloth to wipe down the frame. He twisted and turned the hand wheel back and forth. Eventually, he determined that the worn out sewing machine needed closer attention, so he moved the appliance further down the counter then asked his customer to follow and step aside.

She obliged, giving me room to move up while she parked herself next to the nearby register. She stood alone with her arms folded, tightly hugging her purse.

She reminded me of someone whose fast food order is holding up the line at the drive-thru, so management instructs her to move to a specially-marked parking spot and wait momentarily for someone to bring her food out to the car. At first, the hungry patron doesn't mind the

inconvenience. But when smiling customers with their cars now filled with the scent of burgers and fries start to leap-frog past and give her a nod as they sip fizzy sodas from plastic straws, she starts to get annoyed.

I put my machine on the soft placemat at the counter for initial inspection, and another mechanic stepped up to help me.

“Something’s wrong,” I told him. “It won’t go.”

He said nothing and looked at the machine, not at me while I spoke.

“I’ve had the machine about 10 years.”

I tried to think of more pertinent information to share and watched him prepare to thread the bobbin. He made an extra loop placing the gossamer string around the bobbin winder thread guide. I didn’t know I was supposed to circle the strand of fiber twice. When he clicked on the power, the machine ran fine, and I felt foolish for bringing the instrument into the shop.

“How much do I owe you?” I asked. He shook his head and gave a wave of his hand.

Relieved, I prepared to take my machine home at no charge.

As I retrieved the pedal and electric cord, I heard the repairman nearby tell my new friend at the “wait-here” spot that he revived her vacuum. She could take the cleaner home today. But the sewing machine needed extensive and expensive work that would take at least a week.

I gave her a nod and scooted out the door where I cringed for her. With my sewing machine, I could go home and make skirts and placemats and curtains. With her vacuum, she could go home and remove carelessly-dropped cereal from the kitchen floor and clusters of dust bunnies from her bedroom carpets.

No need to shrug. Sewing machine trumps vacuum any day. I stand by my answer.

The Poet (That's Me)

By Shelby Carlton

*She lives in imaginary worlds,
Her head full of vivid colors and unfamiliar faces,
Her dreams full of memories and lost voices.
She is oblivious to the chaos that surrounds her,
Focusing instead on the unseen—
Watching characters flicker and dance before her eyes,
People that no one else can see.
She remains lost in her own head,
Her thoughts full of words and rhyming phrases,
Returning to reality only when needed.
She listens to the people around her and looks past their words,
Discovering the pain buried inside their hearts.
She sees through their lies and deceit,
Finding the truth hidden in their eyes.
She knows that existence is full of pain and is inspired by her own
heartbreak—
She writes poetry about love and betrayal,
Words flowing from her aching soul.
She is acquainted with both angels and demons—
They know her by name and call out for her at night.*

*Sin and tragedy are her common enemies,
But when she is full of despair she writes through the tears.
In her dreams she escapes to faraway places,
In her thoughts she exists in fantasy worlds.
She is familiar with the unknown,
Friends with strangers and things that are unseen.
Her heart is full of passion,
Her soul full of inspiration—
She is a writer, an artist, a poet—
A girl that relies solely on imagination and creativity—
She is who I was, who I am, and who I always will be.*

The Surgeons

By Shelby Carlton

I woke up in a state of disarray,
Panic flooding my veins,
My brain filled with foreboding.
They are paid to cut me open,
To remove a piece of me —
Then stitch me back up to keep all the blood captive inside my body.
My life is in their hands,
In the hands of strangers —
People I have never met before.
The notion fills me with a sense of dread,
My thoughts restless and chaotic.
They are paid to put me to sleep,
Rendering me helpless and defenseless.
Lost in oblivion,
Unaware,
Unable to fight for my own survival.
I must rely on these strangers to bring me back from the brink,
To guide me back to reality.
Overwhelmed by the terror gripping my heart,
Uncertainty clouds my mind as my swirling thoughts —
Full of darkness and chaos —
Torment me endlessly.
“Have faith,” my mother tells me.
I must put my trust in these people,
These surgeons I do not know —
Allow myself to become completely vulnerable,
Trapped in a deep sleep that I cannot wake up from —

Lost in the sleep of the dead until the medicine leaves my veins.

“Everything is going to be fine,” they say.

Somehow I am not convinced.

Somehow I am not convinced.

Without You

By Shelby Carlton

Once again I am haunted by the remnants of my dreams,
Feeling lost as I am caught in the broken pieces of my past.
I am trapped in the unknown,
Hidden away in the depths of darkness.
Linger with me in the unknown,
Rid me of my sorrow and regret —
Save me from this never-ending anguish.
You were here and then you left,
But when I close my eyes
You appear before me,
As vivid as you were the day you left.
Stay with me in the unknown,
Kiss me with the promise of forever,
Where only death can separate us.
We can remain here for all eternity,
If only you choose to come back to me.
I call your name in the darkness,
But your face is hidden from me —
Shrouded in flickering shadows,
Your murky grin wavering into an icy grimace.
You don't want to be here —
You never wanted to be here.
Why have you come?

To torment me, break my heart, and crush my soul again?
Your dark eyes lock with mine,
And I am captivated by their devilish secrets.
Then I blink and you're gone,
Disappearing from my world once again —
I am left alone,
Without you always —
Forever wandering an unknown, unseen world —
Forever searching in vain for you.

Just Write

**Meetings Held 2nd & 4th Wednesdays @
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