

# One Autumn Evening

*Caryn Hacker-Buechel recalls an encounter with an inspirational hero in the fight against hunger.*

The Kentucky air was crisp, that October of 1974. Aromas of cool, ripe apples and colorful fallen leaves were mixed with an added hint of rising awareness...and it hung in the night air like a cool dreamy mist. I was just a college freshman, with budding dreams and ideals, though it was tough for anyone to recognize that as I stood in the highly coveted front window of the local Burger King in my polyester yellow pantsuit and signature puffy beret. It was the uniform of my part-time job; one that I took on during high school and continued through my first year of college. I had diligently worked my way up the "burger ladder" from "back-board" ketchup swirler to "front board" whopper-creator and I knew that it took seven pickles and three tomato slices to cover a burger bun. For my advanced educational prowess, I was promoted

to the "front window," where I greeted the customer, took their order and then their money. By day, I was surrounded by the aura of intellectual and psychological growth and by night I smelled of fry grease and burger meat; no clean autumn air for me.

It was a quiet, boring night in the burger joint when the strangers came in. This motley threesome looked like a crew straight off a New England harbor fishing boat. The first man was tall and lean with tousled, thick, reddish hair that matched his under-cleft-chin beard, which skimmed the green collar of his turtleneck sweater. A long trench coat added a serious note to this scene. The next man was taller still with a burly, black beard and darker eyes and the third man was shorter, quieter and blonder. The first man moved to the window, looked into the young eyes of

this late night fast food queen, leaned in and placed his order. "I'd like to order...a smile," he offered and his eyes danced. (Sigh.)

The next night I attended a crowded concert by a fairly unknown group performing at the university. Now dressed in worn jeans and a tie-dyed T-shirt, I sat cross-legged on the floor, five rows from the stage as the band emerged. To my amazement and delight, it was the same men from the night before. The lead singer who, only the prior day, took a kind moment to acknowledge a young, yellow-clad girl in a boring job was... Harry Chapin.

American folk/rock singer/songwriter Harry Forster Chapin (1942-1981) was best known for his deep, poetic and haunting messages interwoven in the complex melodies performed by his onstage trio. Occasionally, his brother



*Harry Chapin Food Bank distributed 15 million pounds of food last year.*



Tom would also join the band. Best known for his #1 hit "Cat's in the Cradle," Chapin also wrote and performed a memorable and insightful work entitled "Sniper," a re-telling of the actual shootings from the clock tower at The University of Texas in 1966 through the mind and insight of Chapin. The piece speaks to the power of unresolved emotional pain as a frightening canvas upon which lives are destroyed by the rage-filled behavior of the shooter. Uncommon in 1966, this piece was a foretelling of present and repeated issues related to violence caused by unchecked psychological trauma.

Chapin was also a dedicated humanitarian who assisted in the creation of the Presidential Commission on World Hunger in 1977, as he believed that "...hunger and poverty were an insult to America." Chapin co-founded the organization's World Hunger Year and was posthumously awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in 1987,

following his death at the age of 38. His work was also the inspiration for anti-hunger projects Hands Across America and USA for Africa. We are fortunate in Southwest Florida to honor his name in our local desire to feed our population.

Although the food bank was originally created in the early '80s, Chapin's widow, Sandy, authorized the renaming of our food bank to include, and thus honor, her husband. The organization remains connected to the Chapin family, who offers lectures and occasional concerts in our area. Harry Chapin Food Bank development director, Miriam Pereira, shares that the "food bank very much follows Harry Chapin's commitment to fight hunger" and that each month, with the help of their partner agencies, they feed at least 30,000 Southwest Floridians. Last year this organization distributed 15 million pounds of food, serving 150 agencies in five counties and demand is growing.

Interested in helping the food bank? Consider attending Aviation Day at Page Field in Fort Myers on November 3. Admission is free to view experimental, antique and military planes; however, attendees are asked to bring canned foods or monetary donations. Last year over 2,000 pounds of food was collected.

During this introspective month and the corresponding Thanksgiving holiday, founded upon the concepts of sharing turkey, corn and friendship, allow a sense of gratitude to grow and swirl like the airy steam off a newly baked apple pie...and then offer a piece to someone else.

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**Caryn Hacker-Buechel, ACSW, DCSW,** began writing books and articles for growing minds during her 30-year career as a psychotherapist and motivational speaker. She is the author of the children's book: "A Bully Grows Up: Erik Meets the Wizard."