



Premiere Poet Carl Sandburg

....1878-1967

THE IDLE AMERICAN

Our Annual Popcorn Rush....

Commentary by Dr. Don Newbury

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Carl Sandburg--his poetry collections winning three Pulitzer Prizes--warmed the hearts of Americans with his beautiful description of how tides roll in, "on little cat feet."

He would be hard-pressed to similarly describe crowd's arrivals at our house each year on October 31. They're in all shapes, sizes, ages and all manner of dress--but, unlike fog--they arrive as if on tidal waves, eager to gather their popcorn. Only a handful say "thank you."

Before you think ill of today's youth, let me quickly add that mere "thank yous" don't seem to be enough; most add two words: "Thank you very much," or something akin thereto....

This marked the 23rd annual popcorn giveaway at our home in Burluson and our 50th year to use popcorn as calling cards or welcome mats. We love these evenings of smiles in an atmosphere of goodwill, when ugly politics and an atmosphere of general negativity are tossed aside for a few hours.

Involved in it all are parents and grandparents, smiling as they watch their youngsters respond with gracious expressions of thanks, even though more treats beckon down the street. They seem highly organized--perhaps utilizing GPS thingies, maps and records--of specific addresses where abundant "loot" is found annually. These kids act as if they fear that Santa Claus might be hovering nearby, making a list of who was naughty and nice....

We don't "keep score" on numbers of visitors. We'll admit, though, that our inventory of small bags (we called them "nickel bags" in days of yore) was reduced by 600 and our stash of popcorn now is 75 pounds lighter. This event is invariably "good medicine" for us. Seeing families arrive with youngsters--their attention to courtesy in

play--does a body good. This year, a half-dozen friends helped fill bags and marvel with us at the creativity. We'll use the age-old description used long ago in small "personals" printed in newspapers across the land: "A good time was had by all."....

Some said they've dropped by for Halloween snacks since "day one;" others said they were attracted by the aroma wafting throughout the neighborhood. This counters my wife's description used across the years; she insists on calling it an "odor."

There were "oohs and ahhs" aplenty, particularly for toddlers barely able to walk alone. Some said nothing, but knew to extend their bags for popcorn deposits. (One kid, perhaps a first-grader, asked if he could "borrow" a bigger bag. It was a request easily granted.)

Many costumes were lit by batteries; some were inflated. A heart-warmer was a four-year-old lad. He wasn't costumed, but carried a sign made from cardboard, attached to a sawed-off yardstick. On it were these words, scrawled with a magic marker: "Will Work for Candy."....

Have we ever seen seasons so "rushed" by store holiday displays? One seen recently promoted Halloween, Thanksgiving AND Christmas.

One pharmacy, however, was unadorned. Pictured, though, was a photo of a handsome dog, perhaps a pharmacy mascot. I asked if the dog had a name. "Rex" was the answer.

I should have known. It was clearly shown on his nametag. Spelling, though, was unexpected. "RX."...

I'll **close** out this week remembering Sandburg, who was to poetry what Norman Rockwell was to artistry in his scenes of Americana on the covers of The Saturday Evening Post magazine.

Sandburg was never thought of as an academician. In fact, he lasted just two weeks at West Point, posting bad marks in both mathematics and grammar.

I suffered similarly in mathematics, but made acceptable grades in grammar. Before suggesting that Carl may have spent too much time in the fog, who is to say that he didn't gain knowledge that isn't reflected on college transcripts? Obviously, many people thought so. President Lyndon B. Johnson called him "America" when Sandburg died in 1967 at age 89....

Dr. Newbury, longtime university president, continues to speak and write. The Idle American, begun in 2003, is one of the nation's longest-running syndicated humor columns. Contact: 817-447-3872. Email: newbury@speakerdoc.com. Website: www.speakerdoc.com.