# Long Gone Daddy

by Helen Hemphill
Publisher: Front Street, middle grade fiction
Publication Date: March 10, 2006

*The first time I met my grandfather, he was laid up on a porcelain prep table at the Hamilton-Johnston Funeral Home. His eyes were wide open and he had a grin on his face, but he was dead as a doornail.*
--from the book

Harlan Q has loved staying with the Hamiltons all summer. After all, he finds funeral work easier that living at home with his zealous father. Now that Grandfather has bit the dust, though, Harlan Q has to convince his Paps, a Bible-thumping minister, to attend to the corpse. With little money and a quickly ripening body on their hands, Harlan Q and his father must tolerate each other for a road trip to Las Vegas.

As they drive Grandfather's body back to its home, Harlan Q and his father pick up Warrior, a Hollywood-bound, Zen-minded actor-in-training. Through flat tires, conversations over Chinese food, and a covert trip to a bar, Warrior pushes Harlan Q to forgive his father's single-minded approach to life. More importantly, the trip forces Harlan Q's father to question his feelings about his long gone daddy, which may help him understand his rebellious son.

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At times rollicking, at times bittersweet, this story of Harlan Q's journey from Bean Creek, TX to Las Vegas, NV in a Chevy station wagon, with his grandfather's smiling corpse in the back and his gospel-spewing father at the wheel, is all about the mystery of fathers and sons, of an ancient prophet in a new body, of love both conditional and not. Helen Hemphill, in her debut, gives us a remarkable tale, told in a voice as old and fresh as a desert breeze.
--- Kathi Appelt

There's Stanley Yelnats IV and India Opal Buloni, and now there's Harlan Q. Stank! Hemphill's protagonist leaps right off the page and into your heart. He's got the voice of a latter day Tom Sawyer, but the raft for his journey is a '72 Chevy wagon loaded down with a casket, no less. Throw in young Harlan's Bible thumping daddy and a would-be actor who calls himself Warrior and you've got a road trip to Vegas you're not likely to forget any time soon.
--- Tim Wynne-Jones

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ISBN: 1-932425-38-1