

The Empty Lot Next Door

Arthur M. Mills, Jr.

Xlibris Corporation (2010)

ISBN 9781450072229

Reviewed by Lisa McCurley for Reader Views (07/10)

“The Empty Lot Next Door” is a tale of a haunting based on the actual experiences of the author, Arthur M. Mills, Jr., at about age eleven. After a move out of the projects and into a regular house in a better neighborhood, Ray (Arthur’s nickname) has great expectations for a normal life. The youngest of four brothers in a family faced with financial trouble and emotional distress, Ray instead endures an ordeal so terrifying, so confusing, that years went by before he could tell a soul about it. This is the story of his visits from Candle Face, the girl rumored to have died in the house fire next door, and who relentlessly tormented him.

But this story is much more than a ghost story. It is also a story of the desperation, the pain and the helplessness experienced by children whose parents work long hours away from home, necessarily leaving them to fend for themselves against both real and imagined evils. It’s about sibling abuse, and the scars that such abuse leaves on the victim as well as the abuser. And this is the story of the intense struggle of a child to make sense of the world without communicating his fears and thoughts to the adults in his life since he doesn’t want to add to the family’s problems.

I began to read this book at my usual reading time, right before bed. After the first night of sleeping with the light on, I ended up taking off two afternoons from work to finish it which is all it took because I couldn’t put this book down. The story is related in such a way that I could truly feel the author’s fear, pain and anxiety. As a mother of two teenage boys, I could so hear the eleven-year-old heart and mind in these pages. There are some places where the information is a little jumbled but it even furthers the style to that of a story told by an eleven-year-old. “The Empty Lot Next Door” is gripping, frightening and well-paced. After the last page I cried; not only because the book was over, but because I was so moved by the emotional experience this little boy had to go through.

I would so like to see “The Empty Lot Next Door” become a movie. It’s a thrilling ghost story, but it is also so much more. Since I live in Austin, I have decided to make a trip to the setting to see it for myself, and wonder if I will see Candle Face. I’m taking a friend, just in case.