

## The Circle Poem

It was back in late 1981,  
James Grimes, wife Sheila  
And their new born son  
Drove 'round Monument Circle's arc  
Where there were no spots  
So they had to double-park  
in front of a bank called AFNB  
Where they'd applied for a loan  
And had to pay the fee.

Officer Cress was on duty  
It was no big production  
Just keep the traffic flowing  
And free of obstruction

Then he saw a car  
Setting astride  
The circle of bricks  
So he pulled alongside  
And yelled,  
"Hey buddy, let's move.  
You can't park here,  
Traffic's got to flow  
This lane's got to clear."

James Grimes looks over  
Tells his wife not to worry  
"Pay the loan with our checks.  
Be back in a hurry."

He turns to the officer  
And with a big smile, says  
"Be patient patrolman, I'll move...  
This won't take a while."

"Hey, buddy, I said move it,  
There's no double-parking!"  
When James ignored him,  
The cop began barking.

"Hey, patrolman, you know  
you don't have to yell...  
just look straight ahead  
and you can tell  
They're double-parking  
on this hub.  
What's that place...  
the Columbia Club?"

Yes, 10 cars were there  
Some occupied,  
And 3 double-parked  
Sitting side-by-side.

But Officer Cress couldn't see  
the obvious double standard  
He took the question personal  
And he felt slandered.  
So, he got steamed,  
I mean he really got salty  
(I think he knew  
in his heart  
his logic 'bout all this...  
was faulty.)

So when Mr. Grimes  
Still didn't move,  
Cress blocked in the man's car.  
His authority to prove,  
He got out of his jeep  
Perturbed and went  
And stuck his head in Grimes' window  
continuing the argument.

Attempting to move,  
Grimes was not fast enough  
Officer Cress got perturbed  
And things got rough.  
Cress reached for the keys  
To turn off the car  
"Don't touch me please."  
Said Grimes.  
"You're going too far!"

Tragically, he pulled off  
'round the Circle's curve  
Officer Cress dangling outside,  
Grime's car began to swerve.

As the two men wrestled  
with the steering wheel,  
Sheila's left foot on the brake  
stopped their automobile.  
She pleaded, "Don't shoot!"  
"Don't shoot!"  
When she saw the gun's  
Flashing stainless steel,  
But the policeman enraged,  
ignored the appeal.

In this conversation,  
Cress got in the last word,  
According to Sheila:  
“I’ll shoot you, you bastard!”

Suddenly silence...  
and stillness  
the turning of heads,  
The busy Circle froze  
with what everyone dreads.

Then Sheila’s wailing  
and sobbing began  
an ambulance, sirens,  
everyone ran  
To see what took place  
while a news camera clicks  
Pictures of blood on the  
Circle’s new bricks.

The next day  
Folks were talking  
and some wondered why  
one man got in trouble  
while others got by?  
They silently realized  
what everyone knew,  
Double-parking on the circle  
was a privilege for a few.

One person said,  
“This is so terrible!”  
“Why did he die?”  
“It was over a parking ticket?”  
“What! That has to be a lie.”

“Hey, isn’t the Circle  
A public space,  
Doesn’t everyone have  
a right to this place?”

Another person answered,  
“Yes, we do, buddy  
but here’s the rub,  
there’s no parking on the Circle  
‘cept at the Columbia Club.”

“You hear what I’m sayin’  
do you know what I mean?”

You must not be hip  
to this scene?”

“You’ve seen *Animal Farm*,  
ain’t ya?  
Well, this is the sequel:  
We’re are all the same  
‘cept some are more equal.”

“‘Some are more equal,’  
Now, that don’t make sense.  
We all pay our taxes  
And pay our rents.  
We all have to obey  
the laws of our city.  
Why did a man die?  
That’s a pity.”

“Well, just look at the facts  
of the offense because  
Big shots can double-park  
and break the laws.  
While tax-paying citizens  
have to pay.  
For the rich and powerful  
Police look the other way.”

“Do you want to know more  
‘bout why that’s the case?  
Why allowing double-parking’s  
a slap in the face?”

“Yes, tell us all.  
It’s such a mystery.  
And the children too,  
So they’ll know the history.”

“Well, the Columbia Club’s  
an old and exclusive place  
where politicians, businessmen,  
‘n lobbyists embrace.

“Here, the wealthy and powerful  
can park two abreast  
and if were you or I did,  
there’d be an arrest.

“It’s our own little ‘White House’  
Where our mayor stops by  
to please special interests  
and then comply.

“In this case  
it was Mayor William Hudnut’s  
weak,  
ineffective,  
‘n negligent leadership.  
See, it was OK with him  
Cops shoot from the hip.  
And this allowed the official  
endorsement  
and attitude of  
overzealous law enforcement.

“Historically there’s an attitude  
in the police assortment  
overly-suspicious  
of black folk’s deportment.  
Many do not know how  
to approach a true man  
So they treat certain people  
as less than a human.”

Now, let’s get back to the story:

“How did Officer Cress  
Get himself in such a mess?  
He could have played it cool  
and called for backup  
or walked away instead  
he let his anger stack up.

“But there’s no excuse  
for a professional lawman  
to let double-parking  
get so out of han’  
he loses control of  
the situation until  
it escalates to the point  
where he will kill.

“Officer Cress was trying  
to please  
his pals, parents, and  
bosses, so in fact  
it was all of his lingering  
insecurities  
that was the cause of this  
tragic and senseless act.

“He wasn’t king,  
but the law was,  
so he could impose his will  
like authority does.  
He had no power,  
but the law did  
he could be a bully,  
and his badge would keep it hid.

“So, it was just another,  
an’ another  
then another poor judgment!  
And he wouldn’t budge  
Now he was stuck--it meant  
He had few options now  
but to aim and shoot:  
Arrest,  
judge,  
and then execute!

“I mean,  
how far do you go  
to deliver a traffic ticket?  
How far does a fox  
chase a rabbit into the thicket?  
What’s terribly wrong  
with this situation?  
Imagine that,  
a man was killed  
as a result of a  
\$7.50 parking violation!

“So, Naptown’s a place  
where injustice remains  
where power gets its way  
and no one complains

“Be they public officials,  
these agents of social control  
teachers, realtors  
or police on patrol  
will continue to maintain  
the distance we know  
that keeps us a part  
‘n maintains the status quo.

“Once a monument  
to our Civil War glory,  
the Circle’s now a reminder of  
a preventable and terrible story.

“We’re like small southern town  
and it’s a shameful disgrace.  
The reason James Grimes died was,  
he didn’t know his place.

“We’ve got to draw the line  
and make everything fair  
democracy’s Monument Circle  
isn’t a square!

“This is a travesty of justice  
And we’re all dam fools  
Until we consider  
these new traffic rules:  
Unless anyone can park  
anywhere for any (length of) time  
on our Monument Circle

I tell you, it’s a crime!  
Or unless no one can park anywhere  
for any time--it’s all cause for alarm;  
So until everyone can double-park  
or no one can double-park  
We’re still livin’ on ‘Animal Farm.’

“So, if you park on  
Monument Circle today  
Don’t forget the price  
One man had to pay.  
To stop this tragic  
hypocrisy  
someone had to die...  
so we must see  
what James Grimes saw:  
All men are created equal  
in the eyes of the law.”

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This poem is based on the shooting death of Mr. James E. Grimes by Indianapolis Police Department Officer Michael Cress on Monument Circle in November of 1981.

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