

Stephen King Stephen King

by William Walsh

My wife and I have been engaged in an ongoing game of Stephen King for about fifteen years.

The game began when we moved into our first home, back in 1996. The real estate agent described the house as pre-Colonial, and it *was* primitive. We wrote an offer for the house on a sunny day. We moved in during a three-day thunder storm. The previous owners left behind a sort of housewarming gift: Twoshopping bags filled with Stephen King paperbacks. There was at least one copy of each of his books, and multiple copies of his really popular titles, like *Carrie*, *Cujo*, and *The Shining*. The bags even contained his pseudonymous books, written under the names Richard Bachman, John Swithen, and Cleo Birdwell.

My wife didn't want to throw the books away, so she put them in the basement. I thought it would be funny to place the books on the dining room table one evening and deny that I had put them there. Then I thought it would be funny if I put the bags of Stephen King novels in the refrigerator and deny that I had put them there. She retaliated one night by filling my pillowcase with the Stephen King novels. She still denies having put them there.

Stephen King soon evolved into a game of hide and scream. One of us would hide on the other and then jump from the hiding place and scream, Stephen King. And Stephen King was also a game of whispers. If my wife dozed off in the living room on a given night, I would whisper in her ear, over and over, until she would wake, Stephen King, Stephen King, Stephen King.

In the early years, we never got tired of playing Stephen King. We played Stephen King at home and we played Stephen King in restaurants, shopping malls, airports, and hotels. We played Stephen King so much that we could have turned pro.

At some point, my wife added a physical element to Stephen King. She would strike me with one of his books or sometimes her hand.

Two examples:

1) At the new Target that opened in town, my wife likes to wait until our paths diverge, then she will circle back to the book section to find the latest from Stephen King. She will sneak up behind me, hit me on the back of the head with the book and shout, Stephen King.

2) Stephen King goes to every Red Sox home-game, and he can often be seen in the stands when the camera is positioned to shoot a left-handed batter. If my wife sees Stephen King in the frame, she'll pause the TV and punch me on the arm as she shouts, Stephen King.

I took my game of Stephen King in a more cerebral direction. Two examples:

1) A guy I work with has a practice of painting a new portrait of Stephen King every time King updates his press photo. He's done dozens of Stephen King portraits, painted in oils, acrylics, dry-brush watercolors, gouache, and airbrush. One night when my wife was out, I hung these Stephen King portraits, gallery-like, in place of all of our family photos.

2) When our first child was born and just home from the hospital, I swaddled a copy of *Firestarter* in her pink receiving blanket and approached my wife in a panicked state. I said, There is something wrong with the baby. My alarmed wife said, What's wrong? I said, She's on fire! And I tossed the blanketed book to her, shouting, Stephen King!

We've had several Stephen King truces and a yearlong Stephen King détente right after the author was struck by a motor vehicle and nearly killed while out for an evening walk near his home in Lovell, Maine. In the last year or two, Stephen King has become a game via email, a midnight Facebook update, a ritual observed on Halloween, or just a shared laugh when we see the woman in town who looks just like Stephen King, with her spooky rectangular head, her short men's haircut, and her squarish Stephen King eyeglasses from the Stephen King Collection at LensCrafters.

Our kids play Stephen King now more than we do. Just last weekend I overheard our daughters jumping rope in the garage. They sang a little rhyme over and over as they jumped. The rhyme went like this:

Stephen King, Stephen King.
You're afraid of everything.
Stephen King, Stephen King.
You're afraid of everything.

