

# Funerals & Fly Fishing

By Mary Bartek

Published by Henry Holt & Company

Copyright September 2004

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Susan Ferendo SCIS sferendo@sbcglobal.net

# Mary Bartek



\*Picture from [www.marybartek.com](http://www.marybartek.com)

In her first novel Funerals & Fly Fishing, Mary Bartek focuses her setting on her childhood experiences. When she was young, her family lived in Windber, Pennsylvania above a funeral home. She thought this was completely normal, and never considered it to be a unique setting for a novel until a friend suggested she write about the experience. She has incorporated her childhood memories in her character, Brad Stanislawski. Prior to writing her first middle school novel, she has published many short stories, essays and articles in professional publications. Mary is an educator as well as an author and really enjoys both careers. She has two daughters and currently resides in Colorado.

- Website: [www.marybartek.com](http://www.marybartek.com)
- Email address: [mbartek@marybartek.com](mailto:mbartek@marybartek.com)

## Annotation

- The book, Funerals & Fly Fishing by Mark Bartek, is a very endearing story about a boy and his grandfather. One summer, Brad is sent to visit his mother's father, who lives above a funeral home. Brad is not very confident about himself, and is picked on continuously about his name. Meeting his grandfather for the first time really helps Brad learn about himself, as well as his heritage. He bonds with his grandfather in a few short weeks, and in the mean time learns the truth about why his mother hasn't spoken to her father in quite some time. This story portrays a wonderful scenario about how kids can act as the "responsible adult" and help their elders to see the truth.

# Booktalk

Do you think it would be creepy to live above a funeral home during your summer vacation? The tall, gangly, Brad Stanislawski is not to excited to find out he has to spend his summer with a grandfather he has never met! Brad has to overcome the fact that Grandpa is an undertaker, and lives above a funeral home...and that's where he is staying for the summer...yikes! There are many similarities between these two relatives. Brad "Stanislawski" is used to being called "San-is-lousy" by his peers, and learns a few valuable lessons from grandpa himself. He also shadows grandpa and takes on a new hobby of fly fishing. If you like to fiction stories about summer vacations...you will enjoy reading the book, Funerals & Fly Fishing.

# Characters:

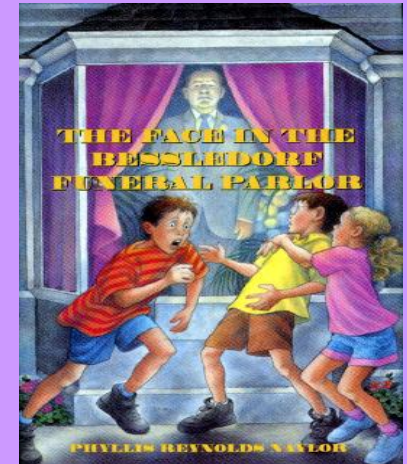
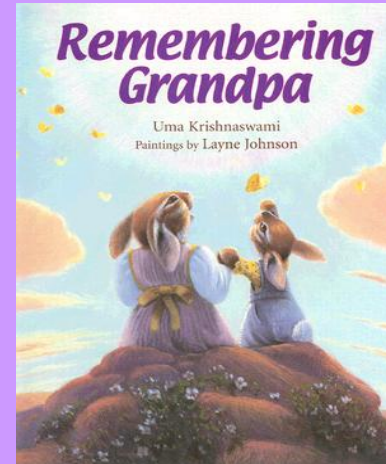
- Brad Stanislawski is the narrator, and has just finished sixth grade. He is a tall, gangly boy.
- Mike is an undertaker apprentice for Stan Stanislawski. He works in the funeral home and is a fairly young man.
- Rita is Brad's trusting mother. She hasn't been to visit her father in a very long time.
- Stan Stanislawski is Brad's grandfather and is a tall, kind old man. He is the owner of the funeral home in Wallace Corners, PA.
- Pat Robinson is a boy Brad's age who Brad meets during his stay with his grandfather. He has red hair and freckles.

# Conflict and Conflict Resolution

- In *Funerals & Fly Fishing*, the conflict is between Grandfather and Rita and the rift between them from the past. Brad is involved in this internal conflict because he sees both sides to the story, and realizes that both Grandfather and Rita are both wrong and need to be reunited.
- Brad voices his opinion and confronts grandfather about a few things he finds while he is in Pennsylvania. He also shares with mom some things that grandfather has told him about the past. When grandfather falls ill, Brad calls mom and "stretches the truth" in order to get mom to come to see grandfather. Once this is accomplished, the Brad's internal conflict is resolved.

If you like Funerals & Fly Fishing, you'll also *love*:

- The Middle of Somewhere by J. B. Cheaney
- Bravo Zulu, Samantha! by Kathleen Benner Duble
- Remembering Grandpa by Uma Krishnaswami
- The Face of the Bessledorf Funeral Parlor by Philis Reynolds Naylor



## Interest Level and Reading Level:

- Interest Level: Middle grades fourth through sixth  
Ages 9-12 years
- Reading Level: Fourth grade, third month

# Read Aloud Passages:

## **Chapter Seven, pgs: 39-40**

Brad is at a local baseball game with his grandfather, and this boy starts a conversation...

“I just thought you might like to know something for your own safety, kid,” the boy mumbles, sliding closer to me on the bench.

I try not to look in his direction, but I’m just too curious.

“What do you mean, for my safety?”

“You know how dead people lay down in the caskets?”

“Yeah. So?” This kid is getting on my nerves.

“Well,” he continues, “you can only see the front of their heads when they’re in there. And it’s a good thing, because everyone know old man Stanislawski scalps the backs.”

“Yeah, right,” I say. “How would you know?”

“He keeps the scalps in a bag in the drain-the-blood room.”

## **Chapter Twenty-four, pg: 121**

Brad and his grandfather were attending a festival when all of the sudden, grandpa fell...

“Give him some room!” a man yells, as he and a woman who seem to know what they’re doing roll my grandfather onto his back. Half the people at the festival have suddenly swooped to the place where my grandfather fell. The hospital is just across the street, and someone must have called for help because the ambulance comes right away. From where I’m stuck in the crowd, I can barely make out grandfather’s pant leg and ankle as they load him onto the stretcher. No one realizes that he was with me. I open my mouth as I crane to see, but no noise comes out.

The ambulance pulls away...

## Setting and Point of View:

- This present day story takes place in Wallace Corners, Pennsylvania. It is Brad's summer vacation and he is visiting his grandfather who's residence happens to be the top floor of a funeral home.
- The story is told in First Person Omniscient. Brad is the narrator, and seems to know everything about all the other characters in the story.

## Theme:

- The main theme in Funerals & Fly Fishing is family relationships. Brad has never met his estranged grandfather and has some pre-conceived ideas about what their relationship will be like.
- This story focuses on Brad, an eleven year old boy, who wants to be accepted by his peers. What he knows about his grandfather is only what his mother has shared...which is virtually nothing. He heads off to visit grandfather because his mother needs a babysitter for him. She is headed off to vacation by herself. Brad is close to his mother and, until spending time with his grandfather, believes she is all he has. Brad thoroughly enjoys the time he spends with grandfather and gains confidence about himself and consequently reunites his mother and grandfather. One can see that the title "Funerals & Fly Fishing" is reference of a few of the things Brad is introduced to by his grandfather to help gain that confidence.

All pictures in this presentation  
are from [www.bn.com](http://www.bn.com)



Susan Ferendo  
Sand Creek Intermediate School  
[sferendo@sbcglobal.net](mailto:sferendo@sbcglobal.net)