

The Typewriter - another Raleigh story

**This event from my adolescence is kind of legendary among my friends and family, so I've finally decided to put it down in writing so I can have a version I'll remember myself before I get too old. The description is a bit graphic if you're squeamish, skip to '*A Day Later...' below.*

The incident occurred in Raleigh around 1977 when I was 12 years old, I was playing with a rubber handball at the closed Brentwood Elementary school on an overcast Saturday. There was an alcove at the back of the school that was perfect for practicing handball because of the concrete walls.

At some point, the ball made an odd bounce and jumped through a security fence, into the interior courtyard of the building. I climbed the fence quickly enough, but once I got to the rooftop, I enjoyed the height. I began kicking all the other lost gear (balls, frisbees, lunchboxes, shoes) off the school and it rained down on the playground – I was delighted.

Once I had cleared the roof, I returned my attention to my missing ball. Peering over the edge I was looking down over an interior courtyard that contained some garbage cans and a 'kiln'. (To clarify, a 'kiln' is a hearth used to bake pottery and was about the size and shape of a doghouse, made of jagged metal and hot bricks).

A local bully, I'll call him Trent, had seen me kicking stuff off the roof and had come by to investigate. He came up behind me suddenly and pretended he was going to push me, but then grabbed me back by the shirt. I caught my breath and felt real fear, then endured a barrage of questions about my activities. I explained about the ball, but he just mocked me - daring me to "jump down and get it".

There was no way I was jumping more than 3 meters, so I ignored him. But then his brother Allen and sidekick Burton also arrived, climbed up, and soon they pressured me to jump as well. I tried to ignore them all and went back to searching for my ball, but the harassment intensified. Just as I spotted my toy, I heard laughter and felt a brutal hand push too hard on my back.

Suddenly, I was flying. Trent had shoved me off the roof. I fell on top of the kiln and then bounced to the ground. Startled, I slowly got up. It didn't hurt too much and I glared up at that as**hole Trent, but he was not laughing anymore. In fact, they all looked horrified and immediately ran off, leaping down off the roof without climbing and biking away in a panic. I thought it was weird they were so freaked out; I was fine and quite capable of climbing out– after I found my ball of course.

Just then I heard the sound of dripping water nearby. As I looked for the source, I saw a ring of red paint circling the kiln about two meters away that I hadn't noticed before. I could not figure out where the sound or the paint was coming from but all of a sudden, I did not feel well. Doubling over I discovered the 'paint' was my blood, and it was squirting in a pretty arc through the air behind me. I turned around like a dog chasing his tail and found a 10-centimeter-wide hole in my thigh and a cut artery spurting like a lawn sprinkler everywhere. I was in real trouble. Then the realization hit me: I was now trapped INSIDE the school! I could die.

Then the adrenaline kicked in. I actually don't know how I survived - my memory may have been affected by the blood loss - but somehow, I climbed that damn fence through sheer willpower and crawled home.

My grandmother freaked out when I arrived all bloody and pale. I passed out on the way to Wake Medical.

A DAY LATER...

The trail of my blood was still on the driveway when we returned home the next morning. Three dozen stitches and a blood transfusion were now part of my recovery, which would take weeks. After I told my story to my parents, the principal, and the police - they questioned Trent and his friends about what happened. The local DA didn't appreciate the hoodlum's attitude and charged him with Felonious Assault, a serious crime. Ultimately the charge was reduced to a 'misdemeanor' (a lesser crime) but the law still required some quality time for Trent at a juvenile detention center.

Later, he and Allen were sent to a military school I never saw them again. And that should be the end of it, but my story is far from over.

And here's where the tragedy gets a little bit...funny.

I was beyond angry at Trent, Allen, and Burton. And although Trent and Allen paid for their crime, Burton was still due for some serious revenge. I was offended, upset and obsessed. None of them had reported the emergency and I easily would have DIED if I had passed out.

The thought haunted me constantly; I could have died. In my mind, Burton had indirectly tried to kill me, and I could think of nothing but payback in the worst possible terms. And I had plenty of time to hatch a masterful plan, six weeks of home recovery with my parents at work all day long. Thus began my plot to undo Mr. Burton Wright and ruin the rest of his life – which I kinda did.

REVENGE

Back in the 70s, the Olivia Raney Public Library was a sanctuary for the curious and creative in a big way. I had already learned how to take the city bus to the main library on earlier missions, but now I was going there to begin my heinous revenge. In a nutshell, I was going to ruin Burton's life through the mail. My plan was to destroy his mind by getting him a 'gift' subscription to every magazine in circulation, starting with the library.

I collected over 200 '*bill me later*' type mailers and I used my mother's portable typewriter to fill them out. (I feared my handwriting might be recognized and thought myself quite clever – but this turned out to be a huge mistake).

At the time, I was delighted - imagining his reaction to all the bridal magazines, graphic medical publications, funeral brochures, and obscure legal journals I was sending. It took hours but eventually, I completed phase one.

Yet I was too petty and angry to be done - so phase two got much darker.

The next morning, I bused down to the fancy-in-name-only 'Chateau II' adult book store on Capital Blvd. No one saw me sneak behind the store at that hour. I opened their nasty dumpster and began to collect more material for my plan. The bin was packed with hardcore pornography - mostly film catalogs, outdated magazines, and gay European stuff. I collected it all in a garbage bag, which got me a few 'looks' on the bus ride back.

Now remember, I was 12, so I thought it was hysterical at the time. It never occurred to me that what I was about to do was a serious crime called 'mail fraud'.

It seems my mother's Olympia SM3 portable typewriter was quite rare, there were only a dozen in my hometown and ours had been to a repair shop 3 years ago. It was the only Olympia SM3 owned by the mother of the prime suspect in a felony mail fraud case, so it didn't take Columbo to figure it out. With the investigation now in full swing, we soon discovered the FBI was suspicious. They were asking the neighbors about us, my mother told me, so she knew something was up.

Then, on a Saturday morning I remember the phone call. The repair shop rang and warned my mom the Feds were just there - asking questions about her office account. She hung up the phone and I will never forget that look. I quickly explained my side of the situation and she was strangely amused about it, trying to be mad. I might have left out the phase two part. Then she realized the potential problems I had created and told me to 'get rid of it' - her typewriter. I buried it in the backyard.

When the FBI arrived later, I recall my mother was courteous but not cooperative. She was always a bit counterculture and soon loud voices were talking about a search warrant. I was sent to my room to 'play' (or 'eavesdrop' as I call it), but I really couldn't hear them that well. Whatever my mother said did the trick - they looked around the house, including my room - searched all over and left, never to return. After some minor punishment, the whole thing was forgotten after a month or so.

CONSEQUENCES

But not so at the Burton Wright household!

I noticed my nemesis started missing classes and I heard rumors he was in some kind of trouble. Yet nothing could prepare me for the reality of the situation until I was passing his house on the school bus one day.

I remember it was around Halloween when I witnessed a couple of workmen installing a gigantic, industrial-grade mailbox in his front yard! Apparently, all these publishers had sold their mailing lists to vendors nationwide and now those ads, brochures, and junk mail just multiplied exponentially. I biked by a few weeks later and saw a US Postal carrier sitting cross-legged on their driveway, sorting large bins of third-class pornography while autumn leaves were falling all over him. I barely choked down my reaction and almost wrecked into their huge post box. Ultimately, I think Burton suffered enough, perhaps too much. By the holidays he was either expelled or dropped out of Brentwood School and by summer the family had moved completely, taking the industrial-grade mailbox with them.

I, however, will always have both the 10cm scar on my leg and the memory of **The Typewriter**.