

The Typewriter

by Jeffrey Scott Pearson - ASCAP

This story 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 incident occurred around 1978 when I was 12 years old, I was playing with a rubber handball at my closed elementary school on an overcast Saturday. There was an alcove near the back entrance to the school that was perfect for practicing handball because of the concrete walls. At some point during my play the ball made an odd bounce and jumped over the back gate and onto the actual school grounds. I climbed the awning 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 building and it rained down on the playground.

Once I had cleared the roof, I returned my attention to my missing ball - but I lost track of where it had rolled. I was looking down over an interior courtyard which contained some garbage cans and a 'kiln'. (To clarify, this '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).

Peering over the edge, I suddenly I heard another person behind me. 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 off, but then grabbed me back by the shirt. I caught my breath and felt real fear, but after a quick exchange he backed off. I explained my problem, but he just mocked me, daring me to "just jump down and get it".

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

Trent had shoved me off the roof. I halfway 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 asshole Trent, but he was not laughing anymore. In fact, he looked horrified and immediately ran off, leaping down off the roof and biking away in a panic. I thought it was weird he was so freaked out; I was fine and quite capable of climbing out— after I got 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. Blood was spurting like a lawn sprinkler everywhere. I was in real trouble.

Then the realization hit me: I couldn't get home now, I was now trapped INSIDE the school! I could die.

The courtyard echoed with my pleas for help, and I struggled to stand. The bully and his gang were long gone and the sky was darkening. I tried to tie a disgusting oily rag around my soggy leg but couldn't make it work, but then I made a decent tourniquet with a gross plastic bag from the trashcan. Blood was everywhere, it was a frightening scene. I began to seriously think I might die from blood loss because it was pooling in the gutter now. Then, the adrenaline kicked in.

I actually don't know how I survived. My memory may have been affected by blood loss. Somehow, I climbed that damn fence through sheer willpower and crawled home – and I never did get my ball.

My Grandmother was at the house when I staggered in. She went into a complete panic mode but cleaned me up as best she could, freaking out the whole time. We were at the emergency room in under ten minutes.

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 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. Then he and Allen were sent to a military school and I never saw them again. 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. Neither had reported the emergency and I easily would have DIED if I had passed out or was unable to save myself. This was a big deal for a teen, I was obsessed.

The thought haunted me constantly, *I could have died*. Burton had, indirectly, tried to kill me and I could think of nothing but payback in the worst possible terms – mind you I was 12. I had plenty of time to hatch a masterful plan too, six weeks of home recovery with my parents at work all day long. Thus began my plot to undue Mr. Burton White and ruin the rest of his life – which I kinda did.

Revenge

Back in the 70s, the 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. Now I was on the express bus going to the Olivia Raney Public library to begin my revenge.

In a nutshell, I was going to ruin Burton's life through the mail. My plan was to blow his mind by getting him a 'gift' subscription to *every* magazine in circulation. I went and found hundreds of free subscription cards at the library magazine racks and jammed them all in my backpack.



Next, I went into the 'card catalog' to find the most obscure publications possible like 'Mushroom Digest', 'Cranes Today', 'Serial Killers Magazine' and even 'PRO – for Portable Restroom Operators'. I collected over 200 'bill me later' type mailers and I used my mother's Olympia SM3 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.

But at the time, I was delighted - imagining his reaction to all the bridal magazines, medical publications, funeral brochures and 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 it gets much darker.

The next day I bused to the local adult bookstore, nobody was around on a weekday morning at 10am. Sneaking behind the store, I opened their dumpster and began to collect more material for my plan. The bin was full of hardcore pornography - mostly film catalogs, outdated magazines and gay European stuff; I grabbed it all. I used the coupons and classified ads to sign him up for anything with "bill me later" as an option: the sicker, the better. Now remember, I was 12, so I thought it was hysterical at the time.

I was worried about postage cost but most subscription cards were 'business reply mail' and thus free. The other selections were worth the stamp, especially the darkest porn. It never occurred to me that what I was about to do was a serious crime called 'mail fraud'. Well, I knew it was wrong, but I didn't know HOW wrong.

I mailed the lot, 273 pieces in all. How do I know the exact number? I didn't count them, the FBI did.

It seems my mother's Olympia SM3 portable typewriter was actually quite rare, there were only a dozen in my hometown and ours had been to a repair shop years ago. It was the only typewriter owned by the mother of the prime suspect in a felony mail fraud case. The investigation was now in full swing.

We discovered the FBI knew all this through the rumor mill. One Saturday morning there was a phone call and shortly afterwards my mother knew everything. Keeping her anger at bay, she told me to 'get rid of it' – her typewriter. The repair shop must have called mom, warning her the Feds were asking questions. I quickly explained my side the situation and she was strangely amused about it, trying to be mad.

When the FBI arrived shortly afterwards, I recall my mother was courteous but not cooperative. She was always counterculture and soon the G-men were talking about a search warrant. At some point I was sent to my room to play. Whatever my mother said did the trick – they looked around, left and never returned. After some minor punishment the whole thing was quickly forgotten.

But not so at the Burton White household! I noticed Burton started missing classes about a month later, and heard he was in trouble because of some porn found in his room. Yet nothing could prepare me for the reality of the situation. As I was passing his house on the school bus when I witnessed a couple workmen installing a gigantic, industrial grade mailbox in his front yard! Apparently, all these magazine outfits had sold their subscription mailing list to vendors nationwide, and now those ads and letters just multiplied exponentially. A month or so later, I biked by and witnessed the mailman sitting cross-legged on their driveway, sorting large bins of third-class pornography baking in the summer sun. I almost wrecked and barely choked down my reaction.

Ultimately, Burton had suffered enough, perhaps too much. He was either expelled or dropped out of our middle school in the fall. Within a year the White family had moved, and the industrial mail container was again replaced by a normal sized postbox with a shiny new nameplate. But to this day **The Typewriter** remains buried in a random yard in Raleigh.

P.S. – Later that year to their credit, Brentwood Elementary redesigned the roof access to make future incidents unlikely.