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For Open Salon : Open Call - 12 Random Facts About Your Life,  
8/1/2014 5:45 PM

**My Delinquent Dozen: Criminal Acts From The Early Years**  
(Reading Copy) (*Substitute this reading version for the other  
Final copy in the folder!*)

**# One (Germantown in Philadelphia, PA, 1939)**

I am sentenced, at age 4, to remain in my room as punishment for  
tossing a three-pound Lionel electric train engine out the window onto  
the terrace below. It lands on the ironing board of a neighbor's maid  
as she presses a shirt. Instead of a prize for this perfect shot I'm  
ordered to stay in my room, door shut, for one hour. It seems like a  
lifetime. On my wall, I watch the sun's reflection rippling off the  
fountain in the courtyard below. It flickers and dances and I fall in love  
with light.

on my wall as it ripples off the fountain

**# Two (Germantown, 1940)**

At 5 years, on a Sunday morning in 1940 while my parents are still  
sleeping, my sister Gale and I open our apartment door to see the  
customary delivery of a bottle of milk, a dozen eggs, a loaf of white  
bread and a big Philadelphia Inquirer, fat with the weekend comics  
section. Oh boy, it's breakfast and the funnies and nobody's made  
me wash up yet. Sitting in the hallway is Gale's play baby carriage.  
I remove most of her dolls from the carriage and lay the Inquirer on  
the padded bottom. She watches as I open the loaf of white bread  
and scatter slices over the newspaper.

WATER  
Ripples on wall  
"The"

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I break all the eggs onto the bread and pour the whole quart of milk onto everything. As I watch, the milk begins dripping from all four corners of the carriage. Our giggling wakes Mom and Dad. There's no French Toast *this* Sunday.

### **# Three (Edgemont in Scarsdale, NY 1942)**

At age 7, I make a backyard swing for my six-year old sister. I pull out the cardboard from one of my father's laundered shirts and unwind a lot of cord from the string ball in the kitchen. After punching four holes in the cardboard to shove the string through, I stand on a wooden orange crate and tie the contraption onto a low-hanging hemlock branch. It sure looks like a swing. I say to my sister "Look, I made you a swing. Sit on it." She shakes her head no. With authority I say, "Go ahead, it's good, I made it for you." Reluctantly, she puts her rear between the strings and sits down. The strings snap and she plops onto a pointy rock. She howls, "Momeeee!" Mom comes and hugs my tearful sister who sobs into her skirt. I'm banished to my room for an hour. I feel very unappreciated.

### **# Four (Edgemont, NY 1943)**

At 8, I hate lima beans. They make me gag. Still, I'm required to eat all my vegetables. I learn to hide them under other items on my plate, like baked potato skins, carefully placed lamb chop bones and wadded up paper napkins. We usually eat in the dining room where it's harder to dispose of this awful vegetable, especially after a Mom and Dad chorus of "Eat all your food. Just think of all the starving children in Europe."

Even though the children are starving, I hate them. I think of a foolproof trick. I pretend to walk into the kitchen with my plate to get seconds. Then, while no one can see me, I scrape off all the limas behind the stove by placing my plate against the wall just over the built-in clock on the backboard and, with a skillful sweep of the fork (or my index finger) slide 'em off into oblivion. A year later, a repairman, moving the stove, asks Mom if we want to keep the fuzzy green pad he discovers in the back? I'm proud of this great scheme even though I get caught and it costs my radio privileges for a week.

#### **# Five (Edgemont, NY 1946)**

At 11, I demonstrate a remarkable skill for target shooting at a local fair. I win a furry yellow bear with a sewed-on smile despite the grossly misadjusted gun sight. All the guns have misadjusted sights so I sight along the barrel and score five bulls eyes. For my birthday, I am given the pre-teen present of a lifetime, a Daisy Red Ryder Model 111 air rifle complete with a tube of copper BB's. Even though I have sworn to only shoot at safely mounted paper targets in the woods, I cannot resist plinking at bottle caps I've wedged into the wooden guardrail posts outside our house. The air gun goes, "Poomp!" followed by a "plink" or a "thuk." When I miss, there is silence as the copper pellet flies off into the woods. Between "poomps," my sister walks by where I'm sitting near the road outside the house. I sight the barrel at the right rear pocket of her blue jeans. The stitched "v" pattern becomes a moving target. I consider the rules but my finger pulls the trigger.

I hear a thwup" sound and my sister whirls around to see me with the Red Ryder air gun. She immediately yowls and screams, "Mommy, he shot me!"

I'm surprised because the part of me that did the shooting expected congratulations for the excellent shot. Instead, my Daisy Red Ryder Model 111 is donated to "Someone who is not trying to put out his sister's eye."

### **# Six (Scarsdale, 1948)**

Shoplifting is an exciting hobby for me at the age of 13. At the local stationery store, I hone my skills first by tossing three pennies for payment of the same quantity of baby Tootsie Rolls onto the counter with such force that they spill onto the floor behind. The cashier bends over behind the counter to pick up the money allowing me to grab two Clark Bars and stuff them into my pocket without being seen.

I graduate from stealing flat Hershey bars, stuffed inside of the comic books I purchase to the masterful concealment of a boxed Strombecker wooden model B-29 inside of the latest issue of Sheena Queen Of The Jungle. At home, my mother sees the B-29 and makes me take it back and recite a humiliating apology to the storeowner.

I lose interest in shoplifting the day the chubby store owner, who is behind the counter, sees me holding a roll of Necco Wafers while digging into my empty pocket for non-existent coins. He says, "Let me show you something in the back. Follow me."

We walked into the narrow stuffy back room, which smelled of cardboard boxes, and he put his hands on my stomach and says, in a whisper, would you like to have that candy? I smell both trouble and the sharp stench of his body odor. I run out of the store to the street. I never go back again, even when I have the money.

### **Seven (Scarsdale, 1948)**

In 1948 I develop a genius scheme to enhance my income above the meager 25¢ weekly allowance so I can buy more comic books and candy. Here's how the plan works. I go to Gristedes, our neighborhood grocery store, where Mom occasionally sends me to charge and bring home items she needs. After greeting the clerk who knows me, I purchase a case of nine quart bottles of Club Soda and charge it, along with the bottle deposit, to our account. Then I walk with the case from the store, out of sight down a grassy hill, open each bottle and pour the bubbly contents into the Bronx River. I wait an hour to give the impression that I have walked home and picked up a case of empties. Then I walk back into the grocery store to claim the refund for the old bottles. Forty-five cents in 1947 pays for three comic books and three Hershey bars with nuts.

Apparently, Dad sees the monthly grocery bill and wonders about our excessive use of Club Soda. He asks me if I know anything about the charge. I wince and scrunch my toes in my shoes and, under continued questioning, timidly confess to all the details of the plan. A tiny part of me is hoping that Dad will appreciate, just a little, the genius of this plan but he is silent and looks dumbstruck.

He shakes his head and begins to talk about taking responsibility for myself and how money must be earned and how it doesn't grow on trees. His voice trails off and he walks away shaking his head.

The next night at dinner, Dad turns to me and says out of the blue, "Gary, I think we should spend more time together."

======( break? Or one more/)=====

### Eight

I'm 13 and like to sleep late. I usually wake moments before my sister captures our shared bathroom. Once in there, she does girl things for hours. I'm locked out. Naturally, I always have to go to the bathroom, badly. I listen carefully to the sounds for a cue as to when I can get in there and pee. This is difficult because Gale has no set routine. With me it's pee, flush, brush, shower and, every three days, shave. Concentrating on Gale's bathroom noises adds urgency to my need.

One morning I am literally hopping from foot to foot. I think I might explode. My father's bathroom is not an option because I hear him in there. My bedroom is on the second floor of our pink stucco Tudor house. I look out of my bedroom window and see the stately 30 foot ftall sweetly fragrant White Pine whose trunk is nestled next to the front of our house and rises only a few feet from my window. Even though its base stands next to our front door, I figure that if I can aim at the trunk from my window, it'll soak in before getting to ground level. Safely hidden by the lush long needles, I crack the window and aim carefully at the tree's bark. My aim is perfect and the relief is blissful.

I make this a regular part of my morning routine except when it snows because I'm not stupid.

25 years later, I take my wife on a nostalgic drive to my childhood neighborhood. I'm regaling her with stories of my childhood while we sit outside my old house with the engine idling. A woman comes out the front door and sees us parked at her curb. She asks if there's anything we want? I explain that I lived in this house and we begin talking. I point to the second floor window to show my girlfriend and the homeowner where my bedroom was. I notice that there is no tree and ask if it the big pine was there when they bought the house.

"Yes," she said. "...but two years later, it just lost all it's needles and died. We had to cut it down." I asked if she knew what killed the tree? She said, "We don't know. We just assumed that you might have had a dog that liked the tree. Did you have a dog?" I answer, "No, we had a cat, who never went outside."

## **Nine**

I meet Diane Silver in 1951 when I'm sixteen after traveling over a thousand miles to Wichita, Kansas for a summer visit with my Uncle Morris.

Morris introduces me to Diane, the sixteen-year old daughter of his next-door neighbor, She has a pretty face with freckles and straight black pageboy hair. She looks at me a lot. Then she asks if I want to drive her 1949 black Ford two-door sedan.

I don't yet have a license but I'm hungry to drive. Diane's beauty and her offer to let me drive the car make me want to spend every minute with her. She shows me the shift pattern and after a few minutes says I'm a good driver. With this, she becomes cuter right on the spot. We go to the afternoon movies to see "On Moonlight Bay" and we sit in the dark balcony where I put my arm around her shoulder and sing along with Doris Day, "We were sailing along, on Moonlight Bay..." Diane whispers in my ear, "You have a beautiful voice." Now I am officially in love. In the remaining two days of my visit, we timidly kiss twice again in the Ford.

I travel back to New York with a broken heart. When I think of Diane's face and remember our two soft kisses, my heart thumps so hard that it actually hurts my chest.

I write to Diane but I don't hear back. I scheme to find a way to make the very expensive long distance call to Wichita. I'm not allowed to make long distance calls but I ask the operator how much it would cost. It's \$1.25 to call Wichita for three minutes. I recall a plan that my buddies said would work. I tie a thread through the opening of a 7/16<sup>th</sup> flat washer that I found in our basement. It is the exact size and weight of a quarter. At the train station pay phone, I plan a test of the scheme by lowering the washer in and out five or six times. Each time a coin (or in this case, my washer) is lowered it makes a bong sound to tell the operator how much is being deposited. When I yank it out the first time the operator surprises me when she comes on the line and says. "Are you having a problem? Can I help you?" I panic.



The washer jams and I break the thread trying to yank it out and escape before any Phone Cops arrive.

Two days later I'm back at the station with another plan. I wad up a piece of notebook paper wrapped around a short piece of string and shove it way up into the coin return slot out of sight. I leave a tiny length of string dangling but it is shoved up so far that nothing shows. I will return in a few days and fish out the wad of paper by finding and yanking on the string. This will release a week's worth of coins that were returned to customers who didn't get their money back but had to rush for their trains. It works. I pull out the paper and collect 5 nickels, two dimes and two quarters. I have almost enough to call Diane so I set the money trap again and return at the end of the week to find that the coin return slot has been replaced with a hinged drawer that defies any more paper-stuffing. When I see this I am frightened because my plan has been discovered and maybe, right now, they are watching me. I hurry home.

I consider hitchhiking the 1300 miles to Wichita but I never do reconnect with Diane. To this day, this romance lives like a tiny jewel sparkling in the landscape of my memory. Sometimes I wonder if Diane found out about my criminal plans, would she still think I had a beautiful voice?

## Ten

Dusk squeezes the last of the day's light from the sky while I march the mile from my house to the five and ten cent store, a half block from the Hartsdale train station. I'm fifteen years old and my pockets are stuffed with a screwdriver, glass cutter, dish towel, folded New York Central train schedule and small hammer, all the tools I will need for tonight's escapade. I slip from the empty main street into the dark alley behind the store.

Using the little glass cutter, I scribe a small arc outside the latch on the sash window leading to the storeroom at the back of the five and ten. Squinting in the dim light from a single bulb at the end of the alley, I check the train schedule. I wrap the towel around the tip of the screwdriver to silence the impact. Just as the 8:14 express train roars by, I place the wrapped screwdriver against the etched arc and whack it with the small hammer. The semi-circle of glass snaps out of the pane and tinkles onto the inside floor. The train clatters off into the distance leaving only the sound of my pounding heart. The latch is now exposed to the outside.

Lifting the window, my stomach flutters. I'm afraid and excited. I climb over the windowsill and move through the darkness, towards the cash register. It stands a dim brass monolith in the shadowy center aisle.

The store's picture window displays a vacant main street washed by a dim street lamp, which bathes the merchandise in a ghostly yellow light.

I can see just enough to navigate past the sloping counters with compartmentalized bays holding sewing thread, soaps, pencils, boxes of chalk, women's underwear and baby socks. I crouch low and crawl to the center of the store where the large, elaborately embossed cash register sits. My heart thumps. The register is near the window and I see the street is empty. I'm on my hands and knees with my head below the counter. Creeping forward, I imagine the coins and bills sitting inside their wood cash compartments.

I arrive at the giant National Cash Register. I'm in the money place. A warm comfort blossoms in my chest and I visualize all the stuff that I will soon be buying.

A passing car's headlights sweep across the counter tops. I raise my arm up to the keyboard of the giant register and feel for the "No Sale" button, which will open the money drawer. I find the brass-rimmed porcelain button and shove it down. The spring-loaded cash drawer flies open, forcefully slamming the heavy brass drawer into my skull. I have a stabbing pain in my forehead and am literally seeing stars. The sudden impact against my forehead causes the loose change to fly up the ski-jump scooped incline of each coin compartment. The shower of money flies over my head and rains onto my back. The coins scatter like confetti sprinkled onto the wood floorboards.

I cringe; imagining the noise from the hail of coins is heard all over town. I rush to scoop up the money and make sweeping harvesting motions, plunging nickels, dimes and quarters into my pants pockets.

I don't miss a penny. After two minutes of wildly shoveling up and ramming all the coins into my jeans, I bolt for the storeroom again and lurch out the open window.

In the alley, I stand upright and feel the cool night air on the skin of my upper hips. My pants, overloaded with heavy fistfuls of change, are sliding down towards the concrete alley. I yank them back up and tighten my belt two notches and scuttle towards the street. My pockets are heavily loaded saddlebags of coins. They painfully slap against my thighs as I trot to safety. It hurts. Ironically, I muse that being rich brings it's own problems.

Later, at home in my room, I wait for the quiet time when my parents are asleep and the light under my sister Gale's bedroom door is out. I switch on my goose-necked desk lamp and begin counting coins. It's this moment that I realize I don't have any bills. They would be quieter and quicker to count but the blow on the head and the noise of falling coins set me into cleanup mode. I'm at forty-one dollars and counting when my eyes begin to close. I'm exhausted and can't continue to count. I return the money to the pockets and roll the pants into a bundle and slide them under my bed.

Tomorrow I will get caught in a daylight break-in and that will begin my trip through the juvenile court system and fortunately lead to my unlikely salvation.

"Lunge"  
"Not Lurch"

Fifty years from now I will finally be a successful person but I am starting to travel that route on a disturbingly dangerous path.

### Eleven

For me, there's nothing sweet about sixteen. It's 1951 and I'm changing schools more often than my underwear. I'm a poor student and a generally troubled kid. Everybody says I'm smart but just don't study hard enough. In 30 years psychologists will dignify this inability to study by naming it Attention Deficit Disorder and listing it in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders but it will be way too late for me to cash in on this juicy excuse. For now, I'm apparently just lazy.

Edgemont, the public school where I'm now in eighth grade, tells my parents that I'm failing every subject and suggests I be placed in a more structured private school for ninth grade. In order to avoid having to repeat the year, they say ~~they will~~ <sup>will</sup> pass me if I transfer. In other words, I'm being paid to get out of town.

Mom and Dad decide to send me 30 miles away to the Storm King Boarding School. This will be my first time living away from home and I'm a little nervous but happy to be going somewhere where I can escape my reputation and start with a clean slate.

In the first week at Storm King, I poke through my roommate's things when he's out of the room. I steal five dollars from a wallet in his clothes locker and use it to place an order with the school for a

beautiful baby blue and white sateen baseball team warm-up jacket with the letter S on the left chest. I'm excited because this jacket will officially make me a member of my new community. A week later, I'm identified as the thief and asked to leave. On the ride home, I don't feel ashamed. I feel a sense of relief that I've avoided facing the consequences of such a humiliating bad start. Mom and Dad quickly redirect me to the very progressive Scarborough School where I will finally begin to flourish and gain credits and a tiny appetizer of self-esteem for my art talents.

I will spend the next 59 years still looking for a baby blue and white warm-up jacket. They are very hard to come by, especially in extra-tall sizes.

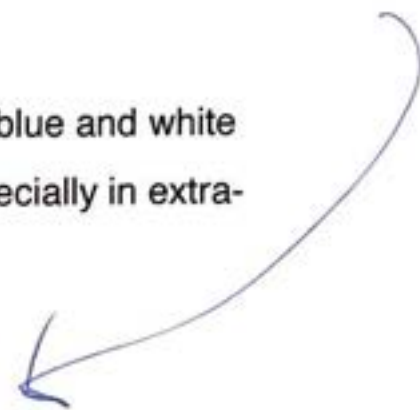
## **Twelve**

(3:50)

The blond wood chair outside the Assistant Principal's office has become my reserved parking spot. It's my daily destination after being kicked out of one class or another in my junior year in yet another high school. Now, I'm in Scarsdale High and I'm still a troublemaker on the short list for discipline.

During our many visits, Assistant Principal R. Bruce McGill and I become friends. He's young, short, good natured and quick to smile, unlike his boss, the notorious Oliver W. Melchior who is frighteningly tall, grim-faced and scary. Mr. McGill compliments my artwork on the posters I make for the Student Council Presidential Election. He

START



treats me like a person, not just a problem.

Mr. McGill and I are chatting in the hall during the boisterous between-class stampede. I look over his head and see my buddies Mike and D.J. tiptoeing quickly out of the boys' bathroom like a couple of guilty escapees only ten feet behind Mr. McGill's back.

Seconds later, there is a booming cherry bomb-size explosion followed by a square cloud of smoke puffing out the swinging bathroom door. People scream and stop in their tracks. Mr. McGill whirls around to look at the smoke and in a continuing motion turns his head back to me, looks genuinely bewildered and says, "I give up, Gary. How did you do that?" We both laugh but I know that in his eyes, I'm still a big problem.

A week later my cut-up buddy D.J. and I are in the boy's lavatory. I have a tube of lipstick, found in the hall, and decide to execute my one-and-only true skill, sign painting, <sup>cut-up</sup> by sketching an artful graffiti on the wall over the urinal. D.J. is giggling and cheering me on and as I craftily letter a warning mentioning our Principal. It's at eye level above the flush lever and says, "YOU ARE NOW HOLDING OLIVER W. MELCHIOR BY THE NECK"

Now, I'm chuckling and snorting with laughter, and so is D.J.. As the sign painting continues, I notice that behind me, D.J. becomes uncharacteristically silent. I embellish the punch line "...BY THE NECK" with some fancy flourishes, finish the masterpiece and turn to

CRASHLEY

see why D.J.'s not laughing anymore. I'm staring directly into the top button of Principal Oliver W. Melchior's pin-stripe vest. He says, "Nice work, Gary. I'll see you in my office immediately."

My heart sinks and I trudge off down the hall and pass the empty blond chair outside Mr. McGill's office. I think, "Well, at least I'm moving up the ladder." ##

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heidibeth's Open Call - 12 Random Facts About Your Life, Don't groan..., juvenile delinquent. A,D,D., creative misbehavior, little bad boy, trouble in school,