

Myron Vandyke

by Frederick Wickert

Myron was an old man with white hair. He was a strong man of medium size and build. Myron had spent a lot of his adult life in jail. To tell the truth, he liked it there.

Myron had worked on farms for years, but he was an alcoholic and lost many jobs because he failed to show up for work, or because he was drunk on the job. When sober, Myron was an intelligent man and a good worker. He was an amiable sort of man as well. Some employers hired him back after firing him, because they knew he was a good worker and often they felt sorry for him.

Myron had a long history with law enforcement. He was one of those characters you never forget. His escapades were many. On one occasion Myron telephoned the police. He asked them to come and get him and lock him up. He was told they could not do that as he had done nothing wrong. He promptly broke into a bank. He got his wish. They came and got him and took him to jail.

Myron usually worked and hung out in Schoharie County, and especially in the town of Gilboa where he often worked on a farm. A state trooper who often patrolled that area and eventually became Schoharie county Sherriff, arrested Myron so often that he gave Myron some forms and told him when he wanted to be arrested to have the paper work filled out when he got there. To everyone's amazement, Myron did just that. All the trooper had to do when he got the call was pick him up and take him to the judge. Usually the charge was disorderly conduct and was normally good for thirty days.

After the trooper retired, Myron stopped doing the paper work. On one occasion Myron was in Schoharie, New York. He was drunk but had not committed any violation. Late at night he came to the door of the County Jail and asked to be locked up. The Sherriff Deputies at the jail told him they could not do that as he had not broken the law. He left the jail, found a rock and took it to the Glass Bar on Main Street. He threw the rock through the window of the bar. He walked back to the Jail and asked if they could lock him up then. They assured him they could.

On another occasion, Myron was picked up drunk and disorderly by a Sergeant in the County Sherriff Department. The deputy was sick and tired of having to deal with Myron all the time. He put Myron in the patrol car and drove to an uninhabited section in a heavily wooded area over the county line into Albany County and had Myron get out of the car. The deputy drove off and left him there, hoping Albany County might pick him up and put him in their jail for a change. The Sergeant hoped that would teach Myron a lesson because Albany County was a tougher jail than Schoharie County jail and he wasn't known there either. The ploy backfired for Myron made it back to the Sherriff Department before the deputy did, and cussed him out when he arrived there.

One summer evening I was eating my supper before going to work at my job as Chief of Police in the Village of Middleburgh, New York. We had a large window in the kitchen looking out on the stone patio and sidewalk coming up to the house from the road. The window was open. Myron suddenly appeared outside the kitchen window. He had not shaved or changed clothes for several days. His hair was long and it was a mess as he had been sleeping in the leaves in the woods across the road. He looked like a real wild man. He scared my wife Tae half out of her skin.

Myron knew me and knew where I lived. He had been on a three or four day toot and had been sleeping it off in the woods. He woke up and recognized his location so he decided to come over and ask me to take him to jail. In those days I used to keep the police car at home so it was conveniently handy. Myron staggered up to the window and asked me if I could take him to jail. Then he began to fall backwards. As he did so, he grabbed at the flower box under the window and it fell upside down on top of him.

I calmed my wife, assuring her I knew him and he posed no danger, other than perhaps to the flower box. I picked up the flower box and put it back on the brackets under the kitchen window. I got Myron a lawn

chair and had him sit down so he couldn't fall again. I asked him if he wanted something to eat. He assured me he didn't, and proceeded to pull a can of beer from his pants pocket, popped it open and took a swig out of that. I advised Myron I was eating my supper and explained that I wanted to finish and then I could take him to jail. He thanked me and said he could wait that long.

I finished my supper and put Myron in the back seat of the car. The car did not have a cage at that time and Myron insisted on leaning over the back of the front seat to talk to me. I kept worrying that he might get sick and throw up all over me but he didn't. He did smoke a cigarette, and dropped the burning but on my rain coat which was laying on the front seat. It burned a hole in my rain coat and the car seat.

When I got him to the judge, he asked the judge if he could give him thirty days. The judge told him he could give him more than that if he wasn't careful. Myron laughed and said, "You old son of b - -ch." The judge then gave him sixty days.

Myron was handy to have around when he was in jail. He never caused any trouble as a prisoner. He was always made a trusty the first morning of his sentence. He always got one third of his sentence off for good behavior. He cheerfully completed whatever task he was given to do. He often was used as kitchen help for the ladies who did the cooking. They liked having him there.

One November night there was a fire call at an old abandoned house on Route 30 just outside of Middleburgh. The fire department responded and put out the blaze. They found Myron on the floor under some newspapers he used for blankets. He was intoxicated as usual, but had been feeling depressed about himself. He had set the house on fire and laid down to go to sleep, thinking it was a good way to end his life. This time instead of jail, he was sent to a mental institution in Binghamton, New York for observation.

After he was released from Binghamton, Myron was arrested a few more times. His health did not seem to be as good as before and he had a persistent cough. The doctor that took care of the prisoners in the jail did a TB test and Myron tested positive. Myron was no longer allowed in the kitchen and was kept segregated from the rest of the prisoners. When his jail term was over he was transported to a hospital and kept confined there until he died. He did not live very long as the TB had run its course too long before it was discovered.

For a few years, officers that had dealt with Myron and remembered him reminisced with each other about him with a certain amount of fondness, for Myron was not a bad guy, and provided a lot of laughs in a business where humor is not all that common. Law enforcement is serious business. Now more than thirty years have passed and some of the officers who knew him are gone too. He is remembered by only a few, and soon his memory will pass with the rest of us.



My wife Tae and I standing by the police car parked in the driveway.



The area of the house and yard with the kitchen window where the flower box was pulled down.