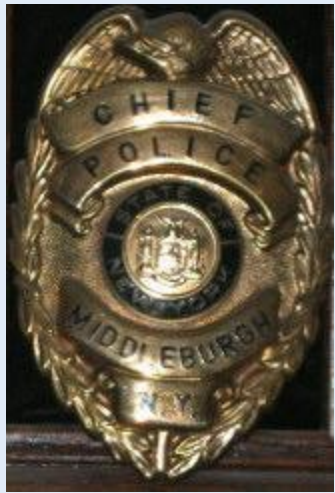


# *The School Teacher's Son*

*by Frederick Wickert*



In the mid 1970's as the Chief of police of a small town, I had occasion to run across a number of problems with juveniles. I also came to know some very nice kids, and unfortunately, a number of kids with all sorts of different problems and needs.

One such boy was a young lad of about thirteen years of age. He was a very nice boy, always well behaved, polite and ready to volunteer for helping his community and those in need. He was the kind of boy everyone admired.

The boy came from a good family. His mother was a county employee and his father was a teacher in the local high school. He painted houses in the summer months when he was not teaching school. Both parents were active in community affairs and were admired and highly respected in the community.

In the town was a very nice high school building but it was becoming over crowded and the school board decided a new building for the elementary children was needed. The matter was put to a vote and the people voted their approval. The site was purchased and the contract was awarded. Soon, construction on the new building began.

It was reported to me as the local police chief, that some things were coming up missing at the construction site. These were things like electric drills and electric saws. I began to investigate these disappearances and tried to get a line on who was taking these things and where they were going.

My investigation led me to the very nice boy, son of the very nice schoolteacher and his wife. I approached the boy and asked him what he did with the stuff he had stolen? He answered that he had hidden them on a shelf in the manhole on the school front lawn. I asked him to retrieve them for me. He readily agreed and the two of us went to the manhole cover.

The boy opened the cover with greater ease than I had expected, and pulled out not only the missing tools from the construction site, but also a number of objects he had stolen from some of the stores in town. The objects stolen from the stores were small and inexpensive.

After retrieving the stolen goods, I took the boy to his father. I told the father what he had done, and suggested the boy be made to return the goods to their rightful owners, together with an apology. I recalled when I was a young boy; I had stolen a cigarette lighter from a gas station operator. The lighter had a lot of sentimental value to him, as it was a gift from his platoon in WWII. He knew I was the one who had taken it and called my father.

My father confronted me and I was forced to return to the gas station, return the lighter and to apologize to the man I had stolen from. I never forgot that lesson and the embarrassment I suffered and never did anything like that again. I believed the same effect could be achieved with this boy. The schoolteacher agreed and cooperated all the way in sending his son into those places to return the goods and apologize.

In the case of a couple of the items, they had been in plastic bubbles, which the boy had torn and removed. The storekeepers said they could not be sold that way, so the boy was required to pay for them with money he had saved. Everyone was satisfied and I believed the boy had learned his lesson. I believed it was not going to happen again. I saw the boy often and he was always friendly with me.

The following spring, I had an early morning call. I went to the home where the call had come from. It was a home where two ladies lived. One was elderly and the other her middle aged daughter. The daughter was getting ready for work. The paperboy had delivered the paper and wanted to collect for the subscription to the paper. She had paid him while he stood outside the front door. He left and she left her purse on the kitchen table.

When the woman returned to her purse, she discovered it was gone. Someone had entered the house and taken the purse. I observed that there was a full view of the kitchen table from the front door. I found the front door was not locked. I checked around quickly and discovered the only person observed on the street at the time was the paperboy. I knew who the paperboy was.

School had just begun. I went to the school principals' office and requested they call both the boy and his father to the office. When the boy got there, I told him to have a seat. He was very nervous and began to sweat. When his father came, I first had a word with him outside the room. Then we went in to the room where the boy sat.

I asked the boy point blank, what he did with the woman's purse. He replied that he had thrown it in the creek after removing the cash. The water was high with spring run off and he said he saw the purse being carried by the current. It had not sunk. The purse contained the woman's keys and her wallet with credit card, drivers license and other things she could not afford to lose.

When asked why he had done this thing, he answered that he needed the money. His father told him he didn't need money because he had quite a bit of money in his savings account. He replied that he could not withdraw money from the savings account without his parents knowing it, and he couldn't tell them why he needed the money. The reason for that was that he needed it to buy marijuana.

His father gave consent and I took the boy to their home. There he produced a small quantity of marijuana and a pot pipe with residue in it.

I could not let this go, so I filed a PINS (persons in need of supervision) petition to the court. The boy was not yet of age for regular court and the record was to be sealed. There appeared to be an effort by the probation department to squash the whole thing because of the parent's reputation in the community. The head of the probation department tried to put pressure on me to drop it. I refused.

Before we went to court for the hearing, the judge wanted to discuss it in chambers with myself, the county attorney and the head of the probation department in addition to the attorney for the boy. The probation officer pushed for dismissal. I recalled the first time the boy was in trouble. At the time the reason he gave for what he did was because his parents had his dog put to sleep and he had begged them not to. They never explained why they had done that.

I spoke up and told the judge that I believed the biggest problem with this boy was a lack of communication between he and his parents. I told the judge I believed they just didn't know how to communicate with each other. The judge immediately jumped right on that.

We went into Family Court and the case commenced. The judge immediately cut through all the formality. He informed the parents that he believed there to be a communication problem between them and their son. He ordered them all, parents and son, to undergo weekly counseling by a psychiatrist for a year. He ordered a 9:00 P.M. curfew for the boy and said he intended to review the progress every three months. The county attorney patted me on the back and praised me. The defense attorney smiled, shook hands and told me I had done a good job. The head of the probation department was furious with me and told me I had a lot to learn about Family Court.

A few days before the boy graduated from high school, he came to me. He shook my hand and thanked me. He said I had turned him around and prevented his getting into some real trouble. He really appreciated all I had done for him and wanted to tell me before he graduated and left home.

Many years later I saw his mother. She was courteous, but cool towards me. I inquired how her son was doing. She told me he was doing very well. He had finished college, and was in his seventh year in his career

as a Naval Officer. I told her I was happy to hear it, and that I always thought he had potential. She gave me a tight smile, her face colored a little, and she said, "Yes, I know you did."

I knew I had done the job right in this boy's case. It was and is a good feeling.