

The Making of a Career Criminal

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Proof positive that there is a latent criminality in Italian-Americans from birth? I stole Rolos from a fellow student in the fifth grade.



I recently took an on-line personality test that revealed that I have the rarest personality type in the world: Intuitive-Thinking-Feeling person. According to the website, this is a character type I share with Eleanor Roosevelt, Ghandi (or is it Gandhi?), and Susan Sarandon. I'm very excited about this revelation. I also learned, in a test called, "Which Jane Austen character are you?" that I am Marianne Dashwood. Well, she's emotional and romantic and so am I. Makes sense. After taking several more of these silly tests, I have determined that one of my favorites is the "Which superhero are you?" test. According to this test, I have the same personality as Spider-Man. This test also revealed that, should I ever turn to crime, or to evil, I would be very much like the Joker. This is a somewhat frightening revelation given how scary the Joker was in the film *The Dark Knight*, but I am not overly concerned that I will turn to evil any time soon.

The first thing I have going for me is the fact that I have the same persoanlity type as one of the world's most respected pacifists. Go me! Not much of a chance of a pacifist turning evil!

The second thing I have going for me is that I feel too guilty when I do something wrong to ever regularly do the wrong thing. Call it an over-sensitive disposition. Call it Catholic guilt. Call it being wimpy. Whatever you like. I like to call it being wicked cool. But I rarely lie, cheat, or steal. Here's why.

When I was in fifth grade, I was in an advanced curriculum in which my class, and others in PS 54, switched teachers by subject, at least one year in advance of students in other Staten Island schools, who had to wait until middle-school to get subject-oriented teachers. So my class would have the science teacher, Mr. Lord, as a homeroom teacher, and, when it was time for other subjects, we would visit other teachers in their homerooms. We went to Mr. Dugan's room for social studies, visited Mr. Motouchin in his room for science, and sauntered over to Mrs. Schuler's room for math. One fateful day, when Mr. Lord's charges were taken over to Mrs. Schuler's math classroom, I sat in a desk that was reserved for a student named Boris during homeroom periods. I was borrowing his desk because Mrs. Schuler was his homeroom teacher, and I was to be a student of hers for only an hour as I studied math, along with my other, fellow "gifted" students.

I was never very good at math, and Mrs. Schuler quizzed us regularly on the multiplication tables. Even though she repeated questions each week, just to make sure the kids who got the questions wrong at first would eventually remember the right answer, I had to take her quiz about six times before I finally remembered that 12 times 12 is 144. To this day, thanks to those regular quizzes, this is one of the few math problems I recall the answer to. (Well, I can be reasonably sure that both 2 plus 2 and 2 times 2 are 4, and that anything times 0 is zero. Otherwise, don't press me on math stuff.

Anyway, I was sitting at Boris' desk and noticed his bagged lunch. I was curious to compare the contents of his bag lunch to the one that mom packed for me, so I peeked inside when nobody was slookng. Lo and behold, Boris had something in his bag that mom had yet to ever pack for me. One of my favorite chocolates. Rolos! I was so jealous. I saw his Rolos and I wanted them for myself.

As near as I can recall, up until that point, I had never stolen anything.



Um ... I might have wandered out of Toys R Us with a ball once because I had so much fun playing with it, I forgot to put it back.

So I stole that ball, but kind of by accident. This time would be the first time I'd have stolen anything on purpose. And I did it partly because I loved Rolos and partly to see if I'd get caught.

Ta da!

Got 'em.

Ate 'em after class.

DE-LICIOUS!

And then the guilt set in.

For three months, I was sorry I ate the Rolos. And, whenever I saw Boris in the hallway, I worried that he had suffered from the lack of his Rolos. I wondered if he suspected me. I felt an overwhelming sense of guilt. I needed to confess. But how would he react?

I thought about it.

I needed to come clean. I couldn't live with the guilt any more. But would he hit me? Boris was, after all, an early grower, and was nine feet taller than most fifth graders, myself included. So I was scared of him. But I consoled myself with the knowledge that most people probably accept heartfelt apologies because refusing a heartfelt apology is kind of mean, isn't it?

So I approach Boris one day and said, "I'm sorry, Boris. I did something bad to you and owe you an apology."

Here's the funny thing. Boris didn't know me from a hole in the wall, so he was understandably confused. The different 5th grade classes in PS 54 had little dealings with one another and I only knew who he was because he was the school giant.



"What?" he asked, looking down on me from above.

"Did you have some Rolos in your lunch that went missing a few months ago?"

His face reddened visibly. "YEAH?"

"Well, I snuck them out of your bag and ate them. Because I really love Rolos. But I feel bad about it, and I'm sorry."

"THAT WAS YOU?!"

Oh ... he remembered the theft of the Rolos. And was mad. I was hoping he forgot, or remembered but had time to get over it and it wasn't a big deal three months later. But his anger suggested a deep resentment that he had been nursing for months as I had been nursing guilt. I imagined him playing detective, trying to uncover who ate his Rolos. I imagined him accusing all the other members of his homeroom class, not realizing that it was an interloper who had stolen his prize Rolos. How could he live with the uncertainty? What kind of blow had I dealt to the trust he had for his classmates? How violated had he felt by the theft?

His awful expression hinted at a great pain.

THIS WAS MY DOING.

"I'm really sorry, Boris."

"YOU ARE NOT FORGIVEN!" Boris declared, and walked away shaking his head, clenching his fists at his side.

At least he didn't hit me, I thought. Looked like it for a minute.

And so, ever since then, I have avoided sinning against my fellow man, in memory of the pain that I had caused Boris.

And Boris, if you are reading this now...



I'm still sorry, Boris!

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