

Assorted Dastardly Deeds

One can hardly go through the week without reading of serious trouble some child or teenager has gotten into. Murder, rape, burglary, drug charges, vandalism, and the like seem to be common place. When I was in school, one would not even think of talking back to a teacher let alone commit some heinous act.

We got in trouble for chewing gum, talking while we were to be doing an assignment or simply being impolite. I tend to remember the punishment I received for my misdeeds much more clearly than the “dastardly deed” itself. What follows is some of the mischief that I remember, and that I am willing to put down on paper! Regarding other deeds, I will remain forever silent.

I tried to put all of the tales into some chronological order, so let us start with the first. This one I do remember the deed. It was in the first grade. I don't remember what provoked the act or even who it was, but one of the girls did something that irked me. Now, what is a young gentleman going to a private school and raised in an upstanding genteel family expected to do. Why, I hauled off and socked her. Mrs. Clark, my teacher was very upset with me, but tended to the young damsel by applying ice to her bruised face! Not too much was said then, but when I left the school building, Rice Hall, Mrs. Clark was leaning down to talk to my mother, who was waiting in the car to pick me up. The ride home was rather stained, and I ended up with only a tongue lashing and expressed disappointment in my errant behavior. A promise to behave and an apology to the girl were surely easy outs.

I must have done something else to cause Mrs. Clark to punish me. I don't remember the behavior, but the punishment is well remembered. We were to have a special assembly. There were some brochures and announcements of a gentleman who was bringing his dogs to do tricks and perform for the entire group of lower elementary grades. As the class lined up to go to the assembly hall, I was relegated to sit in my seat and read while the rest of the class left for the “dog and pony show.” Oh, great disappointment! I could only imagine what the show was like. I heard tales of it later from my classmates. It was not something to be missed. But I had missed it. I was bored being the only one in the classroom. I read or did something for a while, then I had to get up and do something! I grabbed a piece of chalk and drew a series of huge letter S's all around the room on the black slate boards. Certainly I would be noticed and they would feel sorry for what I had to endure. I was instructed to erase the boards, and not much else was said. I got the stares from my classmates and we all went on with our work. How is it that this is so clear, but the deed that precipitated it isn't? Was the deed so bad, or was it simply the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back?

If one child can be distracting to a teacher, two can even be more so. So it was with Russell McLeod and me. We had been in kindergarten and first grade together and one day we found ourselves in deep trouble. Again the errant behavior is long forgotten, but we were to march ourselves down to the office of Miss Slingerland, the principal of the lower elementary grades at Punahou. We weren't to be seen for a few minutes, so we were to sit quietly in the reception area. For all I know, the reason we were there was for talking too much, so we proceeded to talk, albeit in low tones. It no doubt was punctuated by some giggling. That got Miss Slingerland's attention. If we couldn't be quiet by our own self control she would make sure that we would be. She found some gauze tape from the first aid kit and literally gagged the two of us. That did get our attention! We were quiet. Miss Slingerland apparently had little experience gagging small boys, and my gag was becoming loose. My biggest fear was to have it fall off and be blamed for removing it myself. We were duly chastised for the talking or what other misdeed we had committed. When class assignments came the next year, Russell and I were not in the same classroom, but then Russell left Hawaii before the third grade started. I saw him once again when his family returned for some business, but the bond had been weakened.

The only second grade incident involved another forgotten infraction. Mrs. Wood had seen fit to send me to see the feared Miss Slingerland again. She was not an endearing woman. Apparently, in her opinion, I behaved like someone in the first grade. To prove her point, she saw fit to send me back to a first grade class for a day! I did not tell my parents and in fact did not realize the full impact of my fate until the next morning. While eating my breakfast cereal, I started crying. My usual walk to school was put aside and mother drove me to school. She must have agreed with the powers that be as I did have to go to the first grade class. I got the stares from all of the kids and the teacher quietly accepted my presence.

Recess came, and I refused to go out to the playground for fear of the ridicule that I would get from my second grade classmates. As I was sitting in the classroom in, walked Miss Slingerland. Why wasn't I on the playground! I guess she saw that the punishment had been effective, so I was allowed to return to Mrs. Wood's classroom for the remainder of the day, again suffering the stares from my classmates.

Fooling the teacher was also a game with second graders. Every we had milk, juice, and graham crackers at mid-morning. The milk was delivered in a wooden crate full of half-pint glass bottles with a round cardboard stoppers. The whole top of the bottle was covered with a waxed cardboard cap secured with a soldered lead wire which was pulled down to remove the cap. We carefully removed the stopper and drank the milk with a straw. There was always just a bit of milk left in the bottom of the bottle. A couple of us took all of the bottles and poured the small remain-

ing out into a single bottle. It amounted to about an inch or so. We then proceeded to tell Mrs. Wood that someone had not finished his milk. She soon addressed the class and we got a short lecture on wastefulness. We fooled the teacher! We fooled the teacher!

My third grade teacher, Mrs. Nicodemus, was an uncompromising dour woman who let the principal do the disciplining. She should have taken care of problems in the classroom, but she relegated her responsibility to Miss Mary Winnie, the principal of the upper elementary grades.

Now, one must appreciate that third grade boys are a mischievous lot. We all had thin wooden rulers as part of the paraphernalia found in a grade schooler's desk. We found that by pushing a thumb tack through the ruler, there was still a short sharp end exposed. Putting a thumb tack on a classmate's chair was common place, and we all routinely checked our chairs. The modified ruler solved that problem. After the victim had looked at the chair for tacks and was in the process of sitting, the ruler was slid into place! The resultant reaction to the sharp tack was a just reward for the clever.

The classroom chairs in that era were fitted with a bent wooden back with vertical rungs. Another important fact to remember was that children's dress was quite different at that time too. True, in Hawaii we didn't have to wear shoes until the sixth grade, and the boys typically wore short pants, but I refer to the girls. Girls always wore dresses and typically had a large bow tied behind them at the waistline. Boys found that untying girl's bows was as natural as breathing. We were in a group and a girl was sitting in front of me sitting in her bent back chair with rungs and wearing a dress with a big bow. By carefully untying the bow by gently pulling on one of the free ends, my prank was half accomplished. I then took the two free ends, fed them through the chair rungs, and re-tied the bow. It was a waiting game. As soon as the girl stood up, along came the chair! The clatter, of course, alerted Mrs. Nicodemus. I was summarily dragged down the hall to see the stout, formidable, steely eyed Miss Winnie, with her hair in a tight bun and ready to take on anyone who would dare cause problems. In a return trip to Hawaii some 30 years after I had left, I found that the new elementary building complex had been named in her honor. I guess they didn't want anyone to forget her. I surely didn't!

As a result of the run in with teacher and principal, my mother had a talk with them in the office and voiced her opinion that she was not paying tuition to have me spend my time sitting on the bench outside of Miss Winnie's office. I also remember that I didn't have any more problems with Mrs. Nicodemus.

To demonstrate that I really was not always a problem child, and there was some lack of understanding by the teacher, fourth grade did not present problems. Maybe I was growing up a bit, but it was also due to the fact that I really liked my teacher. Her name was Winifred E. Dunham.

This is significant because she is a teacher whose full name is still etched in my memory. Now it is true that my first grade teacher, Mrs. Clark's first name was Ruby, and that she had an unpronounceable Greek name before she was married, but she is the only exception. Mrs. Dunham was helpful, and seemed to understand youngsters, both boys and girls. She was someone you could talk to and she often had a cluster of kids around her desk further explaining to those who needed it.

The time frame escapes me, but Dr. Crooker took over as principal when Miss Winnie retired. He became the new disciplinarian. For gum chewing I was to return to campus on a Saturday morning to study. Since I was the only one involved and there was some monitoring involved, I spent the time at a table adjacent to Dr. Crooker's office. He didn't want to be there any more than I did and after a reasonable time in his eyes, he dismissed me.

On to fifth grade. We had started on the Punahou campus, but that year was 1941, and after December, our class first met at a nearby church building and later all of Punahou School was meeting in the various education buildings on the campus of the University of Hawaii. The elementary school met in a building which was designed for teaching school age children as part of the education department's campus school. My teacher was Mrs. Gail, who went on to teach the same class in the sixth grade. The war years brought us together in many ways and Mrs. Gail fostered that togetherness and we all liked her very much.

Togetherness did not prevent boys from being boys. Testosterone and sexual curiosity tends to raise its ugly head about this time. New words entered our vocabulary, and the "f" word was one of them. Somehow saying it gave you power and let everyone know that you knew about something normally reserved for someone much older. It was during a note passing episode where the forbidden word had been spelled backward in a feeble attempt at concealment and passed on to another knowing pal, that the note was intercepted by a girl, of all people! Smugly and dutifully she gave it to the -teacher. We were in deep s----! We had a long talk with Dr. Crooker and Mrs. Gail. I will have to say that after it all, Mrs. Gail stuck up for us and knew that it was just a phase that most young boys go through. We had renewed respect for her, even if we had gotten into trouble.

Mrs. Gail was not unfair but still had to take care of disciplining the kids in her class. Again, for some forgotten behavior, my desk was placed out in the hall just outside of the classroom door so that I would get my work done and not be a disturbing influence in class. It was a two day stint, if my memory serves me.

It was sometime during these early years that my mother became exasperated and threatened to send me to the mainland to military school. I pondered over this and came to the conclusion that this would be kind

of neat. The back of Sunset magazine and the Reader's Digest had ads for military schools and I perused them with interest.

Keeping in the time frame of my Punahou in-class episodes, I jump ahead to the seventh grade. Notice that this was an "episode," not a prank or bad behavior. I was wearing a pair of old high top work shoes to school. At one time I had tried to put some old baseball cleats on them for hiking in slick muddy areas, but it was not successful. Apparently it had loosened up the soles somewhat and the shoes gave forth with a very audible squeak. I was wearing them because they were comfortable and had no ulterior motive in mind when I had a little experience in study hall. I was minding my own business and actually was doing an assignment when my pencil lead broke. The sharpener was across the room. I got up and walked across the room, sharpened my pencil and returned to my seat. The loud squeaking got everyone's attention and there was a bit of tittering. I had not planned the trip, nor was I trying to get attention. The study hall teacher wasn't sure about my motives, and announced, "Try that again and see what happens!" Jeez!

Out of class "dastardly deeds" or reference to them have been saved for last. They seem to fall into a slightly different category so I present them here for your reading.

Joan Halford was literally the girl next door. For some reason unknown to me, as kindergartners, the two of us were chosen to be part of some school PTA function. There were gifts which were put into a wagon and a wheelbarrow. Joan pulled the wagon and I pushed the wheelbarrow into a room full of mothers and teachers, and then left. End of story—for me. My mother was at the meeting and heard some mother comment that the boy was that awful "Jimmy" Craig. She took issue with the woman and announced that she was my mother, much to the lady's embarrassment. Some how I already had a reputation of sorts. (It was after I came home from school one day complaining to my mother that the teacher, Mrs. Bryant, was always saying, "Jimmy, don't!" to a class of eight "Jimmy's" when I started going by Marvin at the suggestion of my mother.)

Now as most can appreciate, there is a difference in just getting into trouble in school and the like, and some true pranks. Probably the most innocent and least distasteful prank would be the black thread and the door knocker gag. Many of the houses in the neighborhood had nice large functional door knockers on the front door. By sneaking up and carefully tying on a piece of nearly invisible black thread to the knocker and then retreating to a secure hiding place, the trick could be accomplished. Gently pulling on the thread would of course cause the knocker to rap sharply on the front door causing the occupant to think there was someone there. The gang of us would of course do it again if the home owner would simply look, close the door without seeing the thread and retire

inside. When they did discover the thread, we would laugh, run, and think we really had done something hilarious.

Let's step up the level of non acceptance. Firecrackers were legal and readily available as I was growing up. The Gartley twins always seemed to have a cache, and I had a few myself. We kept them in tin Band-Aid boxes for safe keeping. I don't know how we came up with the knowledge that you could make them explode under water. We took some powdered sugar and mixed it with salt peter, available at the drug store. (This is the same salt peter that was rumored to be put in the soup at boot camp to reduce the libido!) The mixture was put on a piece of paper and the fuse of the fire cracker was surrounded by the mixture. The whole thing was then rolled up so that the fire cracker was covered in the paper and the powdered mixture took up the space in the rest of the tube. A little glue held it all together. It was then weighted with a small rock and tossed into shallow water after lighting the mixture. The combination of the mixture would burn and produce enough oxygen so that the fuse would also light after a moment or two. The result was a small geyser. Science is wonderful!

The nearest location of shallow water was the lily pond at Punahou School. In Hawaiian, Ka Punahou means "new spring," and the pond was a result of that spring. The whole pond was fairly deep and was laden with lilies with their round flat leaves and blue blossoms. At one end, however, was a shallow place near the water source. There were also tadpoles and minnows swimming about looking for mosquito larvae. Like adults who use dynamite to fish illegally, so too we sought to see if we could "land" a few tadpoles or minnows. We did, in fact!

The lily pond was a haven for toads, and Bill Curtis and I managed to catch them. But more about the toads in a moment. Bill's father was the principal of Punahou's "Senior Academy," or high school and the family lived in a school provided home on campus. Remember Dr. Crooker? He had a home on campus too. The back of their home had a set of French style doors that led out to an open patio or lanai. From the road above you could look down on the patio clearly.

There was a party at Crooker's one evening and any number of people was out on that patio. We took a recently caught toad and tied a long string to the hapless creature's back leg. We went to a position above the patio and started to swing the toad back and forth, so that when we released the string, the toad would end up in the middle of the crowd. That's where it ended up! We watched hoping for a major commotion, but there was only a minor interruption of party goers. There was some satisfaction, but not what we had hoped for.

Halloween pranks are classic, and a gang of us were on our way to find screen doors to soap. We were not in costume and were just roaming around a neighborhood in Monoa Valley. A maroon and white Honolulu Police Department car with a couple of friendly cops stopped and at-

tempted to make conversation. It was one of those techniques that said “we’re here to prevent trouble and don’t you foster any.” How were they to know that while we were all clustered around the car, most all of us were trying to hide the fact that we were using our bars of soap to coat the surface of the police car as well as the back window! When they drove off, we made fast tracks!

I end the list of deeds with a change in venue to South Pasadena, California. This is the high school I attended after leaving Hawaii in December 1946.

There were a group of us who today might be called nerds, or some other such name. We didn’t belong to the “in group” at South Pasadena-San Marino High School, and we weren’t into dating. George Jennings even wore wire rimmed glasses and worked on radios! We liked things mechanical and picking locks was a challenge. Most of the locks that students had for their lockers in the main building were the built in combination lock type. But in one of the other buildings one had to provide a padlock. We were not sophisticated enough to be able to open tumbler type expensive locks like Master Locks make. On the other hand, students didn’t buy the expensive kind.

We had stiff wire or pieces of small rod stock which we had bent or filed to accommodate the cheap locks. A few carefully chosen turns of the pick would open the lock in no time, just as if we had a key. We would then take the lock from a locker at one end of the building and swap it for the lock we had taken off a locker at the other end of the building. It resulted in much gnashing of teeth and profanity from the locker users!

As an adjunct, the lockers in the main building were, as I said, combination locks. The locker owners would often dial all but the last number so as to be able to quickly spin the dial, open their locker to deposit books and rush off to the lunch line in the cafeteria. To “help them out” so that nobody would steal anything, we would spin the dial for them, and then open the door and immediately slam it shut. This resulted in having to stop and go through the whole combination before the locker would open. More gnashing of teeth and profanity. Wouldn’t this come under the heading of a harmless prank and be considered just good clean fun?

Speaking of “clean” fun, Dick Collins, Jerry Dicks, Bill Edmondson, and others of us came in the possession of a stirrup pump, so called, because the “D” shaped handle looked like an inverted stirrup. I was designed as an extinguisher for small fires. It was cylindrical in shape, with the pump handle on top and about a four foot hose with a small nozzle. It held about 3 to 5 gallons. Two of us could easily hold it steady and actuate the pump while another could direct the hose and nozzle.

Now picture the two operators in the back seat of a car with the “nozzleman” sitting in the front passenger seat with the hose at the ready. On a Friday or Saturday night we would pull up to a bus stop where a young

person was sitting and give them a few shots of water. We didn't pick on older folks—we had some sense of propriety! We were in a station wagon on one occasion and pulled up to a movie theater where there was a long line for the late show. We were “doing our thing” when a beat cop who was there for crowd control whipped out his pad to write down our license number. I reached out the open back window of the wagon and covered up the plate with my hands. Luckily the traffic light turned green and we were off like a shot. What if the back window was closed? What if we got stuck in traffic at the light? We cooled it for a while after that episode.

I guess we males all have to pull pranks and engage in questionable behavior once in a while. Here are a couple of incidents where others were involved, and I among others was simply an observer.

The lockers in the boy's gym required padlocks to lock them. We were all issued combination locks that also had a key hole in the center of the dial for a master key. One day someone picked up an open padlock and with a group of others decided to pick on some innocent fellow they knew would not fight back. They proceeded to strip his pants off, took the lock and snapped it shut at the base of his scrotum, making it impossible to remove without crushing his...well you get the picture! Sheepishly he went to the coach's office to have it removed. The master key did the trick.

The boy's gym had a large concrete area in front and it was an ideal protected area for a nearby pre-schooler to ride his tricycle. He was a bright little kid and some wise asses took it upon themselves to teach the kid a few things. He went home and shared them with his mother. She was enraged and had a serious talk with the coach, who then admonished all of us. Gesturing with the middle finger and using the “f” word were not appropriate for his young age. (He would have to wait until at least the fourth grade!)

I guess pranks are fun only if you are doing them. Some are obviously inappropriate, but one usually finds that out after the fact. As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, I wasn't going to tell you everything. To tell the truth, there really weren't a lot of other “dastardly deeds,” and there is only one that I think that would be in bad taste if I were to repeat it. There are always parts of one's life that should not be revealed!