

## Where Has My Little Dog Gone?

In April of 1993, I moved to a small suburb just outside of Chicago. I had been promoted to store manager at a new Amazing Video. In light of my new position, I found myself a quaint one-bedroom home with a one-car garage and a white picket fence. Suburbia was a nice little package of joy I knew I could just barely afford.

The first people to approach me were the Sanders, the next door neighbors. They lived in a nice eighties-style brick home to my right with an above ground pool and a minivan in the driveway. Julie Sanders and her eldest son Billy came over with a tin of brownies the day I began moving my stuff. It had been raining but stopped and I had taken a break and sat down with a six pack of Old Style when they approached me.

"Hi, we saw you moving your things. I'm Julie Sanders, and this is Billy...say hello Billy."

Billy got the biggest look of degradation the face of a nine-year-old child was capable of making and he spat out his reply, "Hello Billy."

Mrs. Sanders gently placed her hand over Billy's mouth and handed me the tin of brownies with her free hand.

"I'm sorry for this behavior Mr."

"Wayne. Want a beer?"

"No thanks Mr. Wayne, maybe later."

"It's just Wayne, not Mr. Wayne. If you really think about it, it's Mr. Foster, but I'm only twenty-six years old and I would rather people call me Wayne."

Mrs. Sanders was struggling with Billy, and I don't believe that she actually was paying attention to me. She swung Billy around by the arm, turned to me smiling, took my open can of Oldstyle and replied "Thanks Mr. Wayne."

About a week later I came home from work late and there was a little old lady in my front yard, crouched over with her ass in the air looking for something in my bushes.

"Excuse me ma'am, can I help you find something?" At that particular point, I felt like I was still at work.

"I'm looking for my son-of-a bitch cat. It's the third time she's gotten out this week. She darted across the street in front of an old Camaro. I thought she was a goner. Then she went and hid in these bushes somewhere, that damn cat's gonna give me a heart attack."

I knelt down when I saw a scrawny yellow tail hanging out of the bushes, it had been a snake it would have bitten her. When I reached into the bushes, my right arm was gashed open in two, long-flowing tracks. I jumped up out of the bushes and screamed, "SHIT!"

My scream caused the cat to fall from its' hiding spot and run across the street. In a mall-walkers pace, the old lady return to her home, picked up that damn cat in front of a mailbox marked Arthur and Irene Polivick.

"Oh sweet Tabby kitty, you had Mommy worried."

Just then a stately-looking older gentleman opened the door to the house across the street.

"Rene, get in here. You're keeping the whole neighborhood awake."

The man nodded his head at me and Irene turned to me shaking the cat's paw and said goodnight. When they finally had closed the doors behind them, I realized that I had gotten blood all over my last clean work shirt, son-of-a bitch cat.

The next morning I got up early to go to the Laundromat and wash my work shirts. I was on my way out the door when I was approached by a well-dressed Asian man.

"Excuse me sir, but I wanted to speak to you about your dog. You see, the noise last night kept me awake and I have a very busy schedule. A man doing the kind of work that I do needs his rest."

My head began to pound, and the color of this guy's tie was just too bright for 7:30 in the morning.

"Well, I'm sorry your resting was disturbed, but I don't have a goddamned dog, and if I did it sure as hell wouldn't keep anyone awake at night, because I would kill it. Being the manager of a video store isn't easy, and for your information, most people like to sleep, even me. I think you need to talk to the Polivicks across the street, they have a cat, and that damn thing got out last night and did this!"

I thrust my right arm forward to show this guy my bloody bandage and a blood-covered blue oxford cloth shirt sleeve on my last clean work shirt. The small man shook his head and shouted at me, enunciating every syllable like I didn't speak English. I thought this was pretty brave of him, because I stand at six-feet-five and have been told that I resemble Henry Rollins from "Black Flag" but then again maybe he thought he was some kind of Karate master. At that point, I really began to lose my temper.

He continued, "Well, maybe if you would keep your dog tied up, none of this would have happened."

"Don't you listen!?! I don't have a goddamned dog!"

"I'm sorry Mr. Wayne, but I saw a dog in your backyard last evening about 10:30. It knocked over my trashcans and left a number in my yard. You moved in and now there's a dog running around the neighborhood, explain that!"

"Coincidence?!?! My name is Wayne Foster, not Mr. Wayne. Listen, I have got to go to the Laundromat to clean my work shirts and I have to be in by noon. If you have the time to

stand in my driveway and accuse me of keeping your happy ass awake, your job must not be as important as mine. I'm in a hurry. Get the fuck out of my way."

"Mr. Won Stein, CPA went marching across my yard to his shiny red, Honda Accord and took off. Later on that day while I was at work, I found out that Hong Kong Fooley frequently rented porno flicks, and he owed Amazing Video \$3.50 in late fees. Maybe it wasn't such a bad day after all. I had my most perky Customer Service Representative (that's a video clerk if you're wondering) Angie, call his ass at work, as well as leave numerous messages on his answering machine about his late fees on "Babes in Toyland." Paybacks are hell.

Sometime in May, I finally saw a dog. I was on my way to work, which felt like the only thing I ever did, when I saw it hiding underneath the Sanders' deck drinking some water. It was a scrawny-looking thing, and it was no wonder it looked that way. I've tasted pool water before and that shit can't be good for you. Personally, I don't know much about dogs, but this little thing couldn't weigh more than twenty-five pounds and it seemed pretty harmless. It had a wiry brown coat and short perky ears. It looked like your everyday, run-of-the-mill, mutt. As I got into my white 1986 Ford Escort, I watched the dog run across my yard and go into a hole in Hong Kong Fooley's shed. I figured that it probably wouldn't hurt for the dog to be in there, so I just left for work. Hong Kong Fooley paid someone to cut his lawn and I never once saw him lift a finger to do anything but use his garage door opener.

It had been another eventful day at Amazing Video. It was one of the days I actually could leave the store at 5:00. I spent the majority of the day shrink-wrapping boxes for the wall. Three new releases came in, and we usually carried about thirty-five copies of the really big films. It seemed I spent the whole day renting out "Mrs. Doubtfire." I think people should get a life, I really hate that movie. Just before I put the last copy of "Mrs. Doubtfire" on the shelf, my District Manager gave me a call and told me I had to run a copy of it on the various televisions that are strategically placed throughout the store. I was really glad I got to leave at 5:00. Of course, I realized that I would be seeing and hearing it for a little over a month, but at that particular moment, I had all the "Mrs. Doubtfire" I could possibly stand. Every five minutes someone called and asked if we had it in, every ten minutes someone came in to check it out, up until the thirty-fourth copy was checked out at 4:35 p.m. Saturday afternoon. The thirty-fifth copy was in our video player, and I had strict orders to keep it there. The District Manager said that it keeps people coming in the store, he was right. When the Assistant Managers came in, I took off, quickly.

I went to the local McDonald's to pick up my dinner, and I noticed the Sanders' minivan. I decided to go through the drive-thru rather than go in. I really didn't want to have to speak to them. I never knew what to say. Coach Sanders, or Ted, was the leader of his family pack, and all he ever wanted to discuss was his high school football team. Julie always sat with a blank

stare on her face and it's no wonder with their two boys. The oldest, Billy who is nine had a tendency to mouth off. The little guy, Christopher, seven has zero attention span. Every Saturday morning that I have off, they manage to play loud enough to wake up the entire neighborhood. There was no way in hell I was going to subject myself to listening to any of their family bullshit. I left the drive-thru with a Big Mac, super-size fries and a Coke and headed home for my couch, MTV and a six-pack.

I pulled into my driveway and got out to open my garage door, when I noticed the Sanders' Ford Aerostar minivan pull in their driveway like a space shuttle. This is so typical of minivan drivers. I pulled my car into the garage and heard the usual screech of Julie Sanders voice.

"Billy! Quit hitting your brother. Get over here boys."

It was nice to see my couch and my television, funny enough I still don't own a VCR.

I had settled down on my couch, finished up my Value Meal and started to watch an old episode of "My Favorite Martian" when I heard a knock on my front door. I went to the window to see who it was.

"Shit."

"Mr. Foster, we were just at McDonald's and we overheard the cashier say that a man driving a white Ford Escort left his \$2.69 change. We realized it was you and tried to catch you, but we lost you in traffic. So I decided to bring it to you, can I come in."

"Sure, come on in."

Ted handed me my \$2.69, walked into my living room and sat on the couch in my place.

"Can I get you a beer Ted?"

"Sure, thanks. Did Julie or the boys tell you we're building a new home?"

I handed Ted the beer and sat in the lawn chair, the only other piece of furniture you could actually sit on in my living room.

"No, I'm rarely home. I have a video store to run."

"With the summer here, I'll have plenty of time to spend with the football team. I have to keep those boys in shape."

"Ted, don't you also teach History this summer?"

"No, thank heavens. Teaching's pretty boring if you ask me. Well, it's been nice talking with you."

"Ok, thanks for stopping by..."

I caught myself almost saying Amazing Video. I was glad that I didn't. It might have prompted him to ask me for free rentals again. That always pisses me off.

When summer vacation came around in the neighborhood, I had seen the dog, whom I refer to as Pinhead, about once a week. Pinhead had done his share of numbers my way, but the

amount of shit he gave the neighbors made up for leaving any in my yard. One day Hong Kong Fooey decided he would cut his hedges. Apparently, his Yard Boy hadn't done it to suit him. When he went to the shed and opened the door he startled Pinhead and he jumped out at him.

"Yip, yip, yip."

"Oh my God! Someone help me."

I ran outside to see what could possibly be so life-threatening and I saw Hong Kong Fooey on top of his shelves in the garage, backed against the corner in pure fear of this little mutt. I chased the dog out of the shed, even though I considered leaving him there. Won Stein was terrified of dogs. I didn't understand it, but I wondered why he was so afraid. Could it have anything to do with the fact that his relatives ate them?

As the summer progressed and the temperature rose, the Sanders' pool looked more than inviting. I took a day off and decided to take advantage of their offer to use it anytime. It was a really hot day in July and the thought of cool water sounded immensely inviting. I gathered up an old towel, put on my swimming trunks and sandals and headed for the door when I heard Billy and Chris playing loudly as usual. I looked out the window and saw what they were doing. Chris was holding the little dog, and Billy was throwing sticks at both of them. Chris ran up on the deck and jumped into the pool with Pinhead. Billy jumped into the pool after him. Billy managed to grab the dog by the tail, causing him to growl, yip and bite Billy on the arm before he got out of the pool. Pinhead then jumped off of the deck and ran across my yard into the hole in Won's shed. Way to go Pinhead, I didn't much feel like swimming anyway.

It had been quiet at the Polivick's for quite sometime and the mere thought of them probably caused a ripple in the space time continuum. Just two hours after my pondering, an incident arose. It was Sunday afternoon and the Polivick's had returned from church. Samantha, that son-of-a-bitch cat, got out into my yard in the bushes. At first, I pretended that I wasn't home but I felt sorry for Mrs. Polivick, so I stepped outside. Billy and Chris were playing with Pinhead again and the little mutt came running to my side. Mrs. Polivick began to panic.

"Oh my God, it's that damn dog again. That's the whole problem."

The dog that had sat down by my feet became startled and ran into the bushes. At that time, that son-of-a-bitch cat scratched Pinhead and began to chase him across the street when a large truck swerved to miss him and hit the cat, killing her instantly. I really felt sorry for Mrs. Polivick, but deep down inside I was glad that cat was dead. Mrs. Polovick ran insider her house crying with the dead cat, I could only imagine what measures would be taken next.

Pinhead sat on the corner for a few minutes and then disappeared into Won's shed. The dog catcher circled the block a couple of times, but never saw Pinhead. That dog was pretty smart.

By August, Won Stein had left on an extended business trip, the Sanders had moved into their new home and Mr. Polivick had gotten his wife a little kitten. I thought it would be free sailing for Pinhead, at least until the kitten was old enough to go outside or Won returned home. Still I found myself thinking about what would happen to him.

"Hey, Wayne, 'Tombstone' in?"

"Sure is Lydia, got one copy left, I also have that copy of 'Aladdin' for your little girl. Do you still want it?"

"No, can't afford it right now. Jessie's little dog ran away back in May and I'm saving up to get her a puppy."

"What did it look like?" It seemed too ironic and it was.

"Maggie was part Cocker Spaniel, part Poodle."

I knew it wasn't Pinhead, because he was most definitely a boy, and not a pretty dog. But I thought I would see if she wanted the little dog anyway.

"Lydia, there's this little stray dog in my neighborhood, and if someone doesn't come get it, the pound is gonna catch it and put it to sleep."

Lydia Wagner's eyes lit up and an hour after I got off work she came by and picked up the little dog. As she was driving away, I felt almost teary-eyed. I was gonna miss that little mutt, a lot.