

BACK TO SCHOOL

The rain lashed out at me as I climbed out of my car. The strong cold wind howled and the force made me shiver. I wouldn't normally be out on a day like this but today was a special day. Today I decided I would return to my old school to re-live some happy memories. I had some happy times there with all my friends and all the games we used to play. Not that I would see anyone at the school now because it had been closed for years. All the children, all the teachers would have moved on to new jobs and new futures. I had the same as them – a job in a bank, good prospects, a beautiful wife, and a healthy son. What more could a man ask for?

Those were happy times and cherished memories. Sadly, memories are all I have left now. I lost my job, my wife, my son, and my self-confidence. I remember the day it all went wrong. My friend Rick told me how I could make a lot of money. He told me how I could transfer money from the bank into a special account. The bank would never detect the transfer and they would never discover where the money had gone. We could transfer millions into this special account. Then transfer a bit at a time to our accounts. No one would be any the wiser.

I wouldn't normally get involved in something like this, but I was desperate. I had crippling debts: credit cards, the mortgage, a home improvement loan, and there were a few friends I had borrowed money from because of my gambling addiction. I saw this as an easy way out. Not only would my debts be cleared I would be able to take my wife Sara to Spain for a holiday. And my son Simon would get that new computer he'd always wanted. So, I agreed to it.

This went well for months until one day Rick rang me at home. His voice was shaking. The police had discovered the special account. He had been arrested and the police were coming for me. I dropped the phone and looked at Sara. She looked at me shocked. She came to me and grabbed my hand. Simon rushed over to me and wrapped his arms around my waist. My caring family wanted to know what was wrong. I could barely bring myself to look at them. How could I tell them that I'd let them down? I couldn't even think straight. In a few moments, I would be put in handcuffs and taken away from them.

Sara always thought I was honest. What would she think of me now? And Simon – I'd always told him that honesty was the best policy. How could I do a thing like this? The things I had given them lately were purchased with stolen money. My heart started to beat quickly as my fear mounted. My mind was racing. What could I do? Run away? No, I had to face it. I broke down and cried. Sara and Simon held me. They told me that they loved me. Would they still love me in a few minutes? The police arrived and arrested me. How Sara and Simon took the news that I was a common thief I don't know. I couldn't face them as my head was hung in shame the whole time. All I heard were anguished sobs.

I was sentenced to five years in jail. I glanced at Sara and Simon as the judge passed sentence. They just stared and I knew that they hated me. As I stepped down from the dock and escorted to the police van, I took one last look at them. All I could hope for was the chance to tell them how sorry I was and hope for their forgiveness. I never got that chance. Sara filed for divorce. I got a letter expressing her hatred for me. I was hurt when she said that Simon hated me as well – especially as the police sold the

items I had bought, including Simon's computer, to pay back the bank some of the money I had stolen. The bank of course had sacked me.

So there I was in a tiny cell with murderers and rapists as my neighbours. I never saw Sara again. She had met someone else and moved away. Rick was no longer here. After eighteen months the stress had got to him and he took his own life by plunging a sharp kitchen knife into his heart.

Years later I am out of jail and trying to rebuild my life. I have a small room in a boarding house and a job cleaning the streets. No bank will ever employ me again, my police record saw to that. I am also taking tablets for stress and depression. So now here I am, standing in the pouring rain on a deserted road. I had to return to school. I wanted to re-experience the happy memories I once had.

I walked through the gates of the school which was hanging off their hinges. The rust had caused them to be in this state. I found myself in the playground. I saw the old climbing frame where my friend Tommy and I used to play. I chuckled when I remembered the time he'd fallen off and scraped his knee. The last time I saw him was at college when we were taking our exams. The last thing I heard was that he had made a good living for himself as a computer programmer and was living in America. He was always a bright spark and a very good friend to me, so I'm glad things turned out well for him.

I entered the school and looked around. I saw the headmaster's office; it was a place where Tommy and I spent a great deal of time. We were right little rascals who spent nearly every other day getting into trouble and marched down to see the headmaster. Tommy once got the cane for insulting the school nurse who checked us all for head lice by calling her Nitty Nora. I remembered the time I went for a check-up, and the frog I had hidden in my shorts jumped out and frightened her. Tommy and I were always getting up to naughty things like that.

Of course, that was years ago. The headmaster's office and indeed every other room in the school lay bare and deserted. I visualized ghostly images of myself and Tommy standing before the headmaster. Our faces were grim as we took turns bending over his knee to receive "six of the best". The images faded away and I found myself in the empty study gazing at four bare walls. The paint was peeling and the floorboards were rotting. The only sound to be heard was the rain and the wind outside.

I walked through the school gazing only at bare walls. I pictured ghostly images of children running through the halls trying to get to their classrooms on time. I entered the large hall where we used to take PE classes. I hated PE. My teacher, Mr. Berbeck, was always picking on me. I was never very keen on exercise. Seeing as I was quite fat (mum fed us well) and I was just too lazy to do anything.

One day I wrote in a letter that I had twisted my ankle. Then I was daft enough to be seen playing football with Tommy in the playground. I got double PE that day as punishment. That is why I always told my son Simon that honesty is the best policy. Before I let him down that is.

This may sound strange to you but I hear voices. Voices of teachers and pupils that were once present here. I mentioned "ghostly images" before as you may remember. They were not just my thoughts. To me they were real. This is why I came back to this

school. To be amongst my friends again. They are not real people of course – they are ghosts of people as they once were.

My doctor thinks I'm mad but he has never seen them. But I see them. And I hear them. When I'm in the dining hall I don't see empty gaps where the tables and chairs once were. I see tables with all my friends eating their horrible school dinners. I always make my old classroom my last stop. My teacher, Mrs. Rich, died of a heart attack a few years ago but I always see her in the classroom writing on the blackboard. Of course, each image would fade as it played out a random part of the past. That was when I would go to the next room. Each room had a ghostly film to play. When the whole school was quiet and still, that was the time I would go home.

I bet you are wondering what happened to Sara and Simon. Well, I'll tell you. On the day I was released from prison I hired a private detective to track them down. He reported back that they were living in Hull. Sara had remarried and was happy. Simon had forgotten about me and was content with his new dad. I tried to contact her, just to let her know that I still loved her and Simon dearly. But they didn't want to know, did they! They told me to go and even got a court order to ban me from going anywhere near the house. The police told me I should let them go and start a new life.

But how could I let them go? They were my life. But I am happy now. I am in my old classroom with all my friends. Sara and Simon are here with me. I couldn't face life without them so I got them back the only way I could. So here they are with me and my friends. I brought them here a month ago. It was on a Friday. The day I murdered them.