

CENTRAL SCHOOL

JUNIOR POLICE

**The Adventures of a
Federal Agent**

by

BILL EVERETT

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ASHLAND, OREGON

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*TO
KATE,
BETH and LYN*

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These are some of the highlights of my life experiences, with modifications that are condensed for context and continuity. I have changed the names of my family, and in some instances the names of friends, coworkers, supervisors and other law enforcement officers. The names of the bad guys and girls are fictitious, with the exceptions of Samuel Sosa and Richard. In order to protect sources and methods, the origins, sequence of events, participants and circumstances in certain investigations have been altered. None of the cases were made with the aid of cell phones, the Internet or Google, since they weren't around at the time.

CHAPTER 1

The Great Escape

I'M JOE BURTON.

Well, not really. That's the name I used when I worked undercover. I had documents to back me up, including a Merchant Marine card showing that I was qualified to work on U.S. merchant vessels. I had never been in a ship's engine room, but knowing the difference between a wiper and an oiler may have saved me from getting thrown overboard on a Liberian flag freighter.

Details will follow; for now, I want to start at the beginning.

I was born in the mid-to late 1930s in a small town in Mississippi. My earliest recollection is of lying face up, probably in a crib, watching two large white eyeballs with tiny black dots in the middle looking down at me, as a large set of very white lower teeth slid back and forth inside the jaw, with frequent pauses to form a gigantic smile. This scene probably starred a babysitter with a weird sense of humor. I will never know, since I was apparently kidnapped and long gone from that part of the country when I was two or three years old.

The second thing I remember is probably influenced by stories I was told about my early days, weeks, and months. These accounts, while accurate, were no doubt embellished with each telling. I don't know the date of this incident, and subsequent moments from my infancy are blurs, sketchy at best. I do remember being in a large

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cushioned seat. It was dark, and someone came by and flashed a light in my eyes and talked with the person seated next to me.



I have to fast-forward now to the next thing I remember, which is being with my mother's parents in Las Cruces, New Mexico, the Land of Enchantment. I found out much later why and how I got there. My father and mother split up sometime between the sliding teeth and the cushioned seat, which was inside a Greyhound bus. My dad's father was a successful attorney. He also served a term on the Mississippi Supreme Court and according to stories, he was a very powerful man in Newton County, Mississippi.

After the split, custody was awarded to my dad, and I lived with him and the powerful granddad in a very big house in a quiet little Southern town. My grandparents in Las Cruces swore that my Mississippi granddad used his power to influence the divorce terms. I have no interest in verifying this information. After the divorce, my mother went to Las Cruces to live with her folks, then to California to work in the shipyards at Vallejo, her contribution to the World War II efforts.

Folk tales claim that I was kidnapped from my dad as a result of visiting rights granted in the divorce to a relative whose name was never mentioned in the stories. On one of these authorized visits, I was delivered to an uncle on my mother's side, and with a female accomplice we boarded a Greyhound headed for New Mexico. At a checkpoint set up for me at the state line in Vicksburg, I'm told, either the local or state police questioned my kidnappers. According to these accounts, the couple convinced the authorities that I was their baby, and my journey continued. I don't remember if my mother was in Las Cruces or in California when I began living with her parents.

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And I don't know how old I was when I first lived with my mother. I know she was in California when I started first grade at Alameda Elementary in Las Cruces. The only significant event I remember from that year, is that someone stole my lunch one day. My teacher, Judy Mason, had me share a sandwich with her daughter, who was also in her class. Her daughter was cute. The sandwich was terrible. When school got out, I traveled to Vallejo with my mother. She remarried a short time later, and we moved to Petaluma.

About the next couple of years, only two things stand out: I discovered I had sprinter's speed and I learned that I was unhappy living around another failed marriage. I don't know the details of the arrangement, but I was allowed to return to Las Cruces and live with my grandparents. For whatever reason, I had no interest in visiting or learning more about the Mississippi side of my family, and no one ever explained to me why no attempt was ever made to return me to my father, though he obviously knew where I was.

CHAPTER 2

Central School

CENTRAL SCHOOL was a large, two-story redbrick structure right out of a 1940s movie set, and was the only school in Las Cruces teaching fifth and sixth grades. I entered fifth grade at ten years old, and began my law enforcement career as a safety patrolman. I had no significant love interests during those days. I do have a picture from summer Bible school, showing me next to a very cute girl with long blond hair and chipmunk cheeks. On the photo, I apparently drew an arrow connecting us and wrote the words “my girlfriend”. I believe her name was Marlene. She was probably visiting from out of town, because she didn’t attend Central School. I would have remembered.

The school was in downtown Las Cruces, with busy streets on all sides and heavy traffic. Students acted as safety patrolmen to assist other students crossing the streets, and were given white Sam Browne belts and silver badges. Patrolmen were required to attend an instructional course before hitting the streets. One day, I was called to the principal’s office and asked if I would fill in for a sick patrolman at a busy intersection. I was given a crash course in the duties and responsibilities, handed a belt and a badge, and took over the post. Later, I was asked to continue at the position for the remainder of the school year. I don’t know why I was selected to fill in, but apparently I did a good job, and it was fun. At the beginning of my sixth-grade

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year, I was called to the office and promoted to lieutenant, placed in charge of the school's safety patrol program and given a blue badge. My assigned duties consisted of making the rounds of the ten patrol posts, observing and making recommendations on performance, and reporting incidents.

Shortly after assuming the lieutenant position, which I considered a big responsibility, I overheard other students commenting that petty thefts were on the rise and were occurring in the classrooms during lunch breaks and recesses. The scope of my authority was limited to traffic safety. I made a decision. One afternoon, I walked to the police station, and after first stopping for a skinny red bag of popcorn at the five-and-dime, I walked into the station, presented my badge at the desk and requested to see the chief of police. I was asked to wait on a bench and, before I could finish my popcorn, I was ushered into the chief's office. I identified myself to Chief Santos Ramirez and gave him a report that crime was running rampant at Central School, and that I had no authority to conduct investigations. Chief Ramirez listened and asked questions. He requested that I return in one week.

I remember that I shook hands with him, but I don't remember if I wiped the popcorn butter off my hand first. I returned one week later to the day, without popcorn, and without an appointment. After a short wait, the chief waved me into his office. He handed me a six-pointed silver badge emblazoned with "Central School Junior Police". He basically told me to take notes of my investigations, report my findings to the principal, and contact him if I needed any assistance. I thanked him and assured him I would do my best to get crime under control at the school. On my walk home, I again stopped at the five-and-dime; I didn't buy popcorn this time, but rather an index-card box for my cases.

The next school day, when I made the rounds, I presented my badge and asked each of the safety patrolmen for their assistance. I told them to keep their eyes and ears open for any suspicious activity and

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report it directly to me. As the weeks and months passed, I received after-the-fact reports on petty thefts of school supplies, bubble gum, snacks, lunch money and lunches, but no actionable information. I duly noted each incident in my files and reported the status of each case as “unsolved”.

Near the end of that school year, I was approached during lunch by a fellow sixth grader. During my stint on the job at Central School, this was the first time I was directly approached by either a student or faculty member with information, yet I am quite sure there were many at the school aware of my enforcement efforts. This student told me he had reliable information that Connie Basquez had just swiped Angela Garland’s purse off Angela’s desktop. I walked around the campus and spotted Connie hanging out with a group of friends. I signaled to her to come over and follow me. I waited for her at the basement stairs, and “badged” her when we were out of sight.

I explained that I had an eyewitness who was willing to testify that he saw her steal Angela’s purse. I advised her that if she returned the purse to Angela’s desk, with the contents intact, and before lunch period was over, I would not file charges (most probably I didn’t use these exact words, but she got the message). I later saw Angela carrying her purse. I showed her my badge and asked her to review the contents of her purse. She complied, and then stated that, to her knowledge, nothing was missing. I did not advise her of the circumstances of my inquiry, and took no further action—I decided to use my enforcement discretion and not notify school authorities. When school was out for the day, I ran home, grabbed my file box, noted the facts of the case, and wrote “solved” in big bold letters. This success was big for me, and probably started me down the road to thinking about what I wanted to do when I grew up.

CHAPTER 3

Junior High School and Law Enforcement

DURING MY CHILDHOOD there, the population of Las Cruces grew from about twelve thousand to around twenty-five thousand. The rapid growth was due to the opening of White Sands Proving Ground, where the first atomic bomb was tested in 1945. Many of the White Sands personnel settled in Las Cruces, and their children—along with those of the personnel living at the base, who were bused to the schools—greatly increased the population of the school system.

The junior high school included the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades. Patrol personnel were part of the school's safety program, but this would have been a step backward from being a junior police officer, so I elected to put my law enforcement activities on hold. My grandparents' modest house was about a two-mile walk to all the schools, and maybe another half-mile to downtown. There was always a handful of neighborhood friends to share the walk, or bum a ride with, to school and to the Saturday movies.

I began the seventh grade after a summer full of Saturday matinees featuring cowboys and agents of the Treasury and FBI. Some of the crime films also included attorney roles, and I hadn't forgotten my Mississippi granddad's success in that field. These careers were already

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part of my “What do I want to do when I grow up?” scheming. The Las Cruces granddad had what he called a truck garden on less than an acre of land, located slightly over a quarter-mile from his house. He grew vegetables and watermelons for home consumption and for sale to roadside stands. I believe that I earned my keep working in that garden.

I entered the garden into a 4-H contest and placed second in the county. I worked there after school and on weekends. I usually walked, and sometimes I rode my bike. The house and the garden were located adjacent to a moderately traveled road. On one occasion, as I was on the shoulder headed home on my bike and facing the oncoming traffic, a hoe I was holding got stuck under my right pedal, throwing me off balance, and into the path of a car. The driver swerved to his left into the other lane. Fortunately, there wasn’t a car coming from the opposite direction. The driver didn’t stop, and neither did I. From that day on, I walked to and from the garden.

I also met Polly in seventh grade. What started as a major crush on my end, settled into a friendship that remained strong for the remainder of our school days. In high school, she was voted our lettermen club’s sweetheart and basketball queen. We hung out at lunch time (no shared sandwiches), and we met once at the theater for a Saturday afternoon movie. I did not consider this a date. At this stage in the game, my goal on a first movie date was to casually drape my arm over the back of my date’s seat and rest my hand on her arm, slightly below the shoulder.

One day during lunch, a couple of friends and I tried a plug of chewing tobacco. And I thought that sandwich was bad? The next period was shop, and I threw up in the trashcan next to the table saw. I asked and was allowed to be excused for the remainder of the day.

I had a front-row seat in social studies taught by Ralph Dixon. By this time, I had a pretty good handle on what I considered to be acceptable values and how the world should whirl. I would ask dumb leading

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questions and then argue my points with him. The school newspaper had published a composite of various students' physical features to form what they considered to be a "perfect" junior high school student. I got tagged for my smile. I would utilize the smile whenever Mr. Dixon ran out of patience with me. I will neither confirm nor deny the story that, in one of our question-and-answer exchanges, Mr. Dixon threw an eraser at me.

At the beginning of the eighth grade, a distant cousin introduced me to Janice, who attended a girl's boarding school in El Paso, Texas. She had long brown hair and met my attractiveness standards. Janice made frequent weekend visits to Las Cruces to see my cousin, and we dated while she was in town. As time went by, I became interested in other local girls. Even though Janice and I corresponded, I felt it would be the proper thing to break up with her in person. I was thirteen, and didn't get my driver's license until age fourteen; plus, I didn't have access to a car anyway. I hopped on a Greyhound to El Paso, and then took a cab to the school one Sunday.

We had "the talk" over a Coke at a nearby restaurant and agreed to remain friends. I escorted her back to the school and caught a cab to the bus station. By this time, it was early evening, and I bought myself four candy bars for the long ride home. As I was eating the first, I noticed two cute girls seated ahead of me, two rows over. I saw them looking at me from time to time, and when I caught them, I flashed that smile. When I finished the candy bar, I noticed that the trashcan was located in an area that would allow me a closer look at the girls.

After I dumped the candy wrapper, I passed by and nodded to them, and they smiled back. I proceeded to do this with each candy wrapper; every time, they became more animated and the smiles got bigger. By the time I made my final pass, both were giggling, barely containing their laughter. It was not until I pulled the handle to dispose of the last wrapper that I discovered I had been putting them

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into a U.S. mailbox. Fortunately, the exit was nearby, and I waited outside for my bus.

Back safely in school, I began to take a real interest in acting. I was in drama class, and was enjoying working on the assigned roles. I tried out for and won a small role in a play that was presented to the entire school. The name of the play escapes me.

That summer, I added to my law enforcement résumé. My granddad's garden was close to a large irrigation canal that was handy for watering. It was also a perfect place for high school kids to steal watermelons from my granddad's patch and then go skinny-dipping. The problem was compounded by the fact that they would break open the melons until they found one they liked. I don't think my granddad ever reported the thefts and vandalism. When this became a recurring problem, I decided to take matters into my own hands. I had a Daisy Red Ryder lever-action air rifle that I used for target practice and for shooting varmints in the irrigation canal. One day, I loaded up Red Ryder and headed for the garden.

I set up surveillance in the tall cornrows next to the watermelon patch. I did this for several days and there was no action, but I continued the surveillance. One day, as I was taking a sip out of a jar of hot water, I heard voices. I peeked out through the corn stalks and saw two big guys and a girl walking over the canal bridge and going straight to the watermelons. It didn't escape my attention that one of the guys was carrying a very large butcher knife, similar to one I will talk about later in this book. I waited until they pulled a watermelon off the vine, and then I stepped out into the hot high-noon sun and yelled, "Freeze, mother truckers!" That was probably not what I said; but whatever it was, I got their attention.

There were no scales at home or at the gym. I didn't finish growing until after my senior year. My best guess is that, at the time of this incident, I was about five foot seven and weighed less than 145 pounds. These were two big guys, even the girl was bigger than I was. I ordered

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them to drop the knife and raise their hands. Surprisingly, they all complied. I then told them to move away from the knife, to form a line, and march to the road. I stopped and picked up the knife and we continued out of the garden and down the shoulder of the road, the perps marching single-file with their arms raised, me holding my trusty Red Ryder BB gun on them.

When we reached the house, I had them continue walking to the backyard while I shouted for my grandmother to call the police. In the backyard, I ordered them to sit down with their legs crossed and their hands in front of them. I continued to hold my Red Ryder on them until a deputy sheriff arrived in ten or fifteen minutes. It seemed like hours. The deputy took a report, the knife and the suspects, and that ended the watermelon thefts. I don't know the disposition of the case. I found out later that the guys were brothers. Both were in the juvenile system, and one had done time in reform school.

I did suffer a mild repercussion later that summer. A new girl about my age moved into the neighborhood and into a house that had a large playhouse in the backyard. One afternoon, we were inside the playhouse talking. I was giving serious consideration to declaring this a date, when rocks started bombarding the roof of the structure. I jumped outside and saw a guy about my age running away. The new girl and I finished our conversation outside. I found out much later that he was the younger brother of the two watermelon culprits. No one was hurt, and I never saw him or the other three again.

I became more interested in sports in the ninth grade. I was still puny, and decided to postpone football until my sophomore year. I did play a little basketball. I continued with drama class and scored a part in a five-episode series broadcast on the local radio station. My role was a fun one, the kid who is always in trouble. No full length play was presented to the school that year. I obtained my driver's license, and honed my driving skills with cars loaned to me by relatives. I am sure they held their breath when they saw me coming. I didn't

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attempt to get a date that year that would require me to drive. I also don't remember any movie dates that gave me a chance to employ the old arm-over-the-back-of-the-seat trick, either. I was looking forward to summer.

CHAPTER 4

Eagle Nest Summer One

EAGLE NEST LAKE is about thirty miles northeast of Taos, New Mexico. When I lived in Las Cruces, Eagle Nest Lake was a popular location for rainbow trout fishing. My uncle was friends with the owner of the boat fishing concession, and he arranged for me to be one of five summer fishing guides. When the time finally came, my uncle drove me there and introduced me to the owner, Tal. Our lodging was a bunkhouse and Tal's wife cooked the daily meals. My duties consisted of taking four or fewer people trolling for rainbow trout. The charge was five dollars per fisherman for three hours, with tips eagerly accepted and expected. I was the youngest of the bunch by two years. Three of the guides had vehicles that we used to travel the twenty miles to Red River on Saturday nights. This was where the dancing and revelry was provided for the tourists, who were mostly from Texas.

I was assigned a twelve-foot Lone Star aluminum boat with a ten-horsepower Johnson motor. Although I was the most requested guide, a fisherman can fall into a slump just like a baseball player. I could be trolling in the same area, going at the same speed, using the same bait as other boats that were hauling in fish almost as fast as they could get the bait back into the water, but no one in my boat could catch a fish. The fishermen in the other boats were loud and excited,

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while there was no conversation in my boat. Just stares. Luckily, the fishing slumps never lasted long, but they were not pleasant occasions.

My duties also included baiting the hooks and cleaning the fish. The cleaning was not a big deal, since the trout didn't have to be scaled. I'd carry the fish to the client's vehicle, strung up on my fingers; and after I placed them in the car, I had a habit of automatically wiping my hand on my pants, ready to accept the tip. (And I still don't remember if I wiped the popcorn butter off my hand before shaking with the Chief.) Most of the time, I would receive a tip, whether we caught the limit or not. Sometimes, I would just receive a handshake, even when everyone on the boat filled their limits. I had a great time that summer. When it was time to leave, I stopped in Taos. With my savings and my summer wages, I bought a 1941 Ford, gray, channeled, with no sway bars, and torn upholstery. I gassed up and headed home to see what fate awaited me at Las Cruces Union High School (LCUHS).

CHAPTER 5

High School Sophomore

THE SOPHOMORE GUYS had initiation to look forward to at registration. The time-honored tradition of the upperclassmen was to “broom” the new students. They would sit in their cars across the street from the campus and, when the new guys left registration, the juniors and seniors would stop the sophomores and make them bend over for several whacks with a broom wrapped tightly with adhesive tape. If the unfortunate student was driving a car, they would chase him down, with the intimidating brooms sticking out of the windows, and force him to stop and accept his initiation. I knew I couldn’t outpace them in my car, but I was pretty sure I could beat them in a foot race. I parked several blocks from the school and walked to registration. When I returned outside, I didn’t see any cars with brooms sticking out the windows, and there was no one standing around with a broom in his hands, making menacing gestures. My timing had been perfect, and I escaped my unofficial welcome to LCUHS.

I settled into school life and looked forward to football tryouts.

By this time, I was probably five foot eight and weighed around 150 pounds. We did not try out for any particular position. The coaches had us go through drills and then made the position assignments. I was pleased to make the junior varsity lineup as starting tackle on offense. I was good at the position, but I also wondered why I wasn’t

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tested at running back. On one play, as I was making my block, our quarterback threw an interception and the runner blew by me. I gave chase, caught up, and pulled him down for the tackle. We had a successful season, but I was not happy. I was the fastest player on the team and wanted to run with the ball. At one practice, I asked the coach to put me in at the halfback slot. He put me in the backfield as a blocking back, but never called my number to carry the ball. I never asked again, finished the season, and lettered.

I was very disappointed and, after much soul searching, I decided to end my brief football career. With this decision came the reality that I would never outrun the defense and cross the goal line for the winning touchdown with no time left on the clock. I was sure I could have made the track team, but I was disillusioned and decided to take a break from sports for the rest of the year.