

## Johnnie—1948-1970

At 2:50 o'clock P.M. on January 22, 1970, the last customer at the branch office of the State Bank of Vinton, at Garrison, Iowa, finished his business and left. The cashier was preparing to lock the door when another visitor appeared—his face masked. Three minutes later the intruder emerged, ran to his nearby car, whose motor had been left running, and speeded out of Garrison leaving a trail of dust. One man, observing the haste, took the car license number.

The robber had no more than reached his car before the astonished banker had telephoned the sheriff and within minutes a deputy sheriff was on the way to Garrison—eight miles away. Within thirty minutes the deputy sheriff, two state highway patrolmen, and a representative of the FBI were at the scene—not to mention a dozen newsmen. But the services of the officers were not needed.

At 3:06 P.M. an employee of Hawk Bilt Mfg. Company in Vinton, happened to look out of the window and saw a man with a bundle in his hand emerging from a car he had just driven into the plant's parking lot. The man ran a few steps, returned to the car, and then started running again,

this time also carrying a gun in the other hand. The employee, Allen Page, recognized the car as belonging to a fellow-employee who was then on duty, and knew something was amiss. Shouting to a couple of his associates, they followed the runner in hot pursuit. The chase ended when the fugitive ran into a private garage. Although knowing the man was armed, Allen Page rushed in and overcame him. Some of the stolen money was scattered on the floor from the struggle when the other pursuers came into the building at Page's call.

At 3:30 o'clock P.M. the bank robber—Johnnie ———, was lodged in the Benton County jail. He readily admitted having committed the crime.

This was not Johnnie's first infraction.

In September, 1959, young Johnnie appeared in the juvenile division of the District Court of Benton County on a charge of delinquency, for having stolen a purse containing \$65.00 from an attendant at the Vinton Swimming Pool, and stealing money from a neighbor's home. He was only eleven years old. A very small boy, he had to stand on his tiptoes to look over the shelf in front of the judge's bench. The presiding judge will never forget the scene of this child, fingers on the ledge, tears streaming down his cheeks, saying "Mr. Judge, do I have to go to jail?" An eleven year old child in jail? The court's entry was "Not committed because of extreme youth. Paroled to

Chief Probation Officer. To remain in parent's custody. Case continued during good conduct."

But Johnnie did not benefit from the experience. Back in juvenile court three years later (1962) for a number of thefts, the fourteen year old was committed to the Boys Training School at Eldora.

Still there was no change in Johnnie's lack of respect for other people's ownership of property. He was back in juvenile court again in 1965, when only seventeen, this time for forging several checks. Because of his past record for the above and other acts of misconduct, the case was transferred to the criminal division of the court and, upon a plea of guilty, he was sentenced to a term of ten years in the Men's Reformatory, a State Penitentiary for younger men for nonviolent offenses.

Johnnie was given an early parole from the Reformatory because he conducted himself well. However, it seemed he could not stay out of trouble, and in December, 1967, he again was placed in jail pending a hearing upon an alleged violation of the terms of his parole. He was given some minor privileges by the sheriff, and one day was permitted to leave the jail proper and sit in the kitchen where the sheriff's wife was working. When she was momentarily called to answer the doorbell, Johnnie disappeared. When he was apprehended his parole was revoked and he was returned to the Reformatory. There he remained

until the latter part of 1969 and was again paroled for good conduct.

The bank robbery at Garrison had been well-planned. Johnnie knew the working hours of some of the Hawk Bilt employees and also where they customarily parked their cars while at work. He knew that occasionally some cars were borrowed by other employees, with the consent of the owner. He also knew how to start cars without the need of keys. He knew the bank usually had no customers the last few minutes before the afternoon closing hour. Johnnie figured he could "borrow" a car, rob the bank, return the car and no one would suspect him. Even the noting of the car number by the Garrison citizen would not have involved him. But Johnnie lost his cool at the last moment. His hurry, when leaving the car which he returned to the parking lot, and his suspicious actions, attracted the attention of one man, Allen Page, who was alert enough to recognize something was wrong and reacted accordingly.

Johnnie was placed in jail the afternoon of January 22, 1970. After breakfast the next morning Johnnie left the open area of the jail and went to his own cell. A few minutes later the sheriff called to him. Johnnie did not respond. He had hanged himself. Johnnie hanged himself in the same cell (although he did not know the fact) that his father, "Bun," had hanged himself in July, 1960, while awaiting trial on a charge of incest.

At the funeral service the woman minister of the church Johnnie had attended sometimes spoke. With deep feeling she recounted her affection for Johnnie and the efforts she and others had given to try to help him. She ended saying, "I wonder just how I failed—what more should I, could I, have done?"

The judge, in a rear seat, asked himself the same question. Johnnie had not been a mean boy. He was pleasant, likeable, and had many friends. He did not want to be bad. Only because of his desire for things which were not his did he come to this end. It was not all his fault. What can society do to avoid such tragedies?

After the closing prayer the funeral service was concluded. As Johnnie's mother left the mortuary, by her side walked a nice looking girl—obviously a nice girl—who lived a hundred miles away. She and Johnnie were to have been married that day. Johnnie robbed the bank to get money for a wedding trip and to set up housekeeping.

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