

Michael Enright:

Delve into the teenage history of many grown men, yours truly among them, and you'll probably find some behaviour that 21<sup>st</sup> century kids would call *sketchy*. There are actions and moments we try our best to forget or, in some cases, remember, because they taught us something about ourselves, our family and our place in the world. From Montreal, here's Philip Fine and Petty Crime Scene.

Philip Fine:

It's 1979. I'm 16 years old. And I'm at a police station with my parents thanks to my involvement in a petty crime. The police need to take a report. My father is calm, now. He erupted a few days ago when, at the kitchen table, he told me I was bringing shame to the family. I invisibly rolled my eyes when he railed.

In his defence, he and my mother had been scared to death a couple of hours before that kitchen table eruption. They'd opened the door to find two police officers standing there. They were asked if they were the parents of Philip Fine. Terrified, they imagined the worst: a mangled son in a fatal accident. Reality should have reminded them that at that very moment I was performing in *The Diary of Anne Frank* on stage at my high school. It was the final performance and I was playing Mr. Dussel, the old man who joins the Franks in the attic. Right after the last curtain fell, my brother came backstage to warn me that my parents were really angry. I better get home.

At the police station, an officer directs us to his desk. I'm mad at Stevie, who surely gave the police my name. I shouldn't be here. I didn't actually do anything.

You need to know about the three guys who had been with me and whose names I've had to change here. They were all bad news. There was Bill, tall for his age and thus able to play Anne's father, Otto. Once, while we were building sets, I saw him nonchalantly take a hammer, walk up to the second floor hallway, and with me blithely watching, bash a couple of locks off their lockers. Then there was Gord, who played Mr. Van Daan, half of the couple holed up with the Franks. He had his own apartment, did drugs, maybe sold some, and always boasted about the sex he was having. And finally there was Stevie. He played a small role in the play, Mr. Krelir, but he had a major role in my predicament and in this crime.

It took place during a rehearsal break. As we made our way back from the mall, we had to cross a field that had one new high rise. Stevie spotted its garage door open, and led me, Bill and Gord inside. The three of them scouted the underground parking lot the way teenagers look inside fridges. Funny enough, they actually found some groceries, in a locked car with a cracked open window. Bill and Stevie were determined to get to those groceries, and their determination paid off. Not only was there food, but Stevie found a key, which he figured

correctly was to the building. We wolfed down the bounty and ran back to rehearsal, polishing off the last of the mini powdered donuts as we ran.

The cop tells me that Stevie was caught when he returned to the building with that key. He asks me to describe the entire incident, and how the car was broken into. I reluctantly begin to talk. The officer types, one meandering finger at a time. My mother says she could help him out. Help him. The cop. By typing. My mother. A receptionist, she's 60-words-a-minute proficient. He agrees and they switch seats. My mother is now taking my statement. I give her details, like Bill sliding his hand through that open window and using a knife to pull up that car-door lock. My mother stops at key moments in my tortured admission, gives me a pained look, and then becomes a stenographer again. As I provide the final details, she types more quickly.

The shame that my father went on about didn't hit me at the kitchen table that night. It hit me when my mother looked back at me hurt. Years later it really sunk in.

As for those three guys, yes, they were all bad news but, funny, they knew how to act, had great timing and never missed cues. Gord's comic bluster was as good as John Belushi's and his sarcasm very Jackie Gleason. Bill, the tall one who played Otto Frank, and broke into the car and the lockers, delivered a precious and defining moment in the play. With the war over, his character met up with trusted family friend, Miép, who had helped hide the ill-fated group. In the closing moment, with dignity and pride, he quietly broke down over the loss of his treasured daughter. Bill brought jaded high school kids to tears.

Off stage, they had the makings of a youth gang. On stage, they were generous ensemble players.

All this happened more than 30 years ago. I've learned to see that when you just hang out and watch people do something stupid, you *are* part of it. You can't just watch tougher guys do something and later deny you played any role in it. I'm in my late 40s now and I don't get involved in dicey situations anymore, which goes I guess with the territory of middle age. But really, I think it may be the sharpening memory of my mother sitting next to me at the police station, her fingers a blur at that Smith Corona, typing up a scene I wished I had never been in.

For the Sunday Edition, I'm Philip Fine in Montreal.