

# **The Bushes**

**A true story from [The Rocklore Files](#)**

**Of [Jamie Thompson](#)**

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When I was a little kid the evergreen bushes at the end of my street were a hot spot in my father's mind. He didn't like them because they blocked the view of the cross street in both directions making it common for automobile accidents to occur there. Cars hit unwary kids on bikes from time to time too. The developer placed the bushes there when our neighborhood was built and every street corner in our whole town had them. As the accidents occurred my father raved endlessly about the bushes in letters to the editor in our local paper. He considered them an unnecessary hazard and believed that the township should remove them or at least cut them back enough so that drivers could see past them.

On the other side of the issue, the bushes were attractive and played an important role in the stylistic presentation of our town - and an attractive town translates to higher real estate values. In my father's domain, though, style played little or no role in practical living, especially when it conflicted with safety. His public rabble rousing earned him a reputation for being a bit of a kook. Of course, he was right. Nothing was ever done about the bushes, though... not by anyone in authority, anyway.

While all the controversy was happening, the bushes were a place of much activity for us kids. They were very thick and dense but there were kid-sized spaces inside them and down at the ground level where we could hide and not be seen by anyone.

The main activity that took place in the interior of the bushes was showing hynies. Yup, showing hynies! It was very common for a group of six or more kids to head up there, disappear into the bushes, and then take turns pulling pants down while the others laughed hysterically. I can remember girls being around when hynies were being shown but I don't recall any of them showing their hynies. Come to think of it, I never showed mine either!

One sunny summer afternoon when I was about four years old my brother, Jake, and I headed up the street. He had a purpose. I was just tagging along. Normally he would've told me to get lost but none of his other friends were around so he let me stay. When we got to the end of our street I followed him into the bushes and we sat cross-legged on the thick mat of dead twigs, sticks, and brown evergreen mulch underneath the green canopy.

"We need wood like this," he said, holding up a twig.

"Okay," I said, poking around the mulch. As I searched for sticks, Jake assembled a pile of evergreen mulch. The scrubby wood was plentiful so it only took me a few minutes to make a nice pile. He picked up some of my sticks and placed them on top of his little pile of mulch.

"All right, let's see what we can do here," he said while fishing through his pockets. A second later I gasped as he produced a pack of matches.

Even though our parents had forbidden us to play with matches, Jake was fascinated by fire and he enjoyed experimenting with it. One day I found him in the garage holding a match in front of an aerosol can.

"Watch this, Jamie!" he said. He pressed the button and the spray can was immediately converted into a flamethrower! He laughed like a crazy man as he waved the jet of flame around. I was amazed that such a thing could happen!

Now I had become his unwitting accomplice in another fire experiment. I didn't know how to get out of it without losing face so I just went along like a good toady.

He struck a match but it wouldn't light. After striking it a few more times it sparked a little and smoked but that was all it would do. "Hmm. Must be wet," he said as he pulled another match out of the pack. He struck the new match and this time it lit right up. I watched with fear and awe as he

held the match to the mulch. Once it started burning he tossed the match aside and blew gently on the little spark of flame, nursing it to life. The mulch caught the flame quickly and it immediately spread to the pile of twigs on top. The fuel was very dry and within a minute we smiled at each other. We had a fire going! Jake kept piling twigs and sticks onto the flame as it grew taller and hotter.

Then something unexpected happened. The flames started licking the dead branches on the underside of the shrubs and they caught fire too! Meanwhile the fire quickly spread to the mat of dead evergreen mulch upon which we were sitting!! We both jumped up and tried frantically to stomp out the spreading flames. It all happened so fast, there was no way we could stop it! Finally we looked at each other in horror and Jake yelled, "**RUN!!**" We took off out of the bushes and ran behind the house on the corner of our street. Then we ran in between the back yards of several adjoining houses.

After running about five houses down we made a quick left and emerged back on our street. There was a lot of commotion going on. People were running down the street toward the bushes while others were looking out of windows and walking out of their houses to see what was going on. Then we heard a siren wailing in the distance. Jake and I looked at each other with our eyes bugging out and then followed the crowd to the scene. The bushes were engulfed in thirty-foot high flames! Thick black smoke adorned with swirling red and yellow embers was billowing into the sky and a large crowd of our neighbors watched as two men from nearby houses sprayed the flames with garden hoses with little effect.

A fire truck arrived along with a police squad car. The firemen quenched the roaring blaze while the policeman asked the crowd if anyone knew how the fire got started. Jake and I were very nervous about being blamed for it so we started wandering through the crowd whispering, "We didn't do it. We didn't do it," even though no one even asked us if we did it

or not! Well, miraculously, no one saw who did it so it appeared that we weren't going to be caught.

Later that night our house was buzzing with conjecture about who lit the bushes on fire. After much discussion everyone agreed that David Ruthardt probably did it. Ruthardt's nickname was "riffraff." He was definitely a troublemaker but I think he was given credit for a lot more devilry than he was really responsible for. All unsolved local mischief was eventually blamed on him.

In the midst of all the discussion my four year old mind I hit upon the realization that I held the key to the mystery. I was very pleased and before long my little mind began bursting with the desire to share my knowledge with someone.

Later on as my mother was putting me to bed I whispered to her, "Mommy, I have secret."

"Really? What is it?" She asked with keen maternal interest.

"I know who lit the bushes on fire today."

"Oh really? Who did it?"

"Jake did it." I whispered.

"Jake did it? Well, that's very interesting." She said. Then she stood up and left the room.

About a minute later I listened in horror as my father went barreling through the house yelling, "@#\$%^ it, Jake, you little \*&^#%\$!" I hid my head under my pillow but I could still hear it all.

"What?" Jake said with a trembling voice, clueless that he had been fingered.

"You lit the bushes on fire today, didn't you?!!"

"No!" He lied without hesitating.

"Jake, you're a liar!"

"I didn't do it, I...ow!, ow!! Wahhh!, I didn't do it...ow! ...wahh...!"

"Jake you're a bad boy and a liar!" yelled my father as he inflicted the final blow and stomped off to the master bedroom.

I had no idea that Jake would get into so much trouble. All I knew was that I had a secret and I wanted to tell someone. I felt terrible for Jake but it was too late to take it back.

The next day all that was left of the bushes was some blackened tree trunks surrounded by a large area of charred grass, ash and debris. I could smell it all the way from our house.

No one ever mentioned the incident to me again. Looking back, I'm surprised that my father didn't shake Jake's hand and congratulate him for a job well done! After all, the bushes that he hated the most were toast and so one of my father's many pet peeves was, at least in part, resolved.

I was surprised that Jake didn't confront me about telling on him because I was the only eye-witness that he knew of. Surely me being the rat was the most logical deduction. But he never said a word about it. That was a mystery to me for many years.

Twenty-five years later Jake and I were reminiscing about things that happened when we were kids. I brought up the burning of the bushes incident and confessed to him that I was the one who told on him... and that I didn't realize what I was doing at the time. I was surprised by his response! His eyes flared and he almost got mad as he said, "So, it was you! You're the one who told on me!! Man!! I thought about that for weeks after it happened, trying to figure out who told on me and it was you!"

My brother Jake. I don't have a nice neat ending for this story because, after all these years, it is still unresolved. All throughout my childhood my dad spoke over my brother Jake repeatedly as though it were a prophecy – "Jake, you're a bad boy and a liar!" Unfortunately, his words took root and came to full flower in Jake's adult life. It is a sad thing. I

haven't seen my brother Jake for a long time. If you see him, tell him God loves him and wants him to come home.

The End



Jamie Thompson is a writer, musician, songwriter, photographer, videographer, husband, and a stay-at-home-dad with two small children.

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