

# The Bag Pipe

by Rick Reil

Having too much unsupervised time on their hands is a recipe for mischief, especially if you're referring to a couple of nine-year-old boys. Add in that the time I'm referring to was during the summer of 1961 and there's even more potential for something crazy to happen. What I'm going to tell you is a true story. I can verify it because it's about my best friend at the time, Jimmy Shirado and me.

At the time my family lived at 1508 Potter Court in Richland, Washington. The adjacent street to the west was Sanford, the street on which the Shirado's lived. Their address was 1506. Separating our houses was a home owned by the Carlson family and about 150 feet of pavement from Potter Street to the end of Potter Court. The Shirado and Carlson's houses' back yards butted up against each other. Jimmy's dad, Victor Shirado built a fence to separate the two lots. Thankfully he built a gate into the fence that provided a quick route for Jimmy and me to visit each other.

The Carlson family was not too fond of us cutting through their yard so we tried to be as discrete as possible. This proved a little hard for Jimmy at times. The Carlson's had a large locust tree in their back yard with a thick climbing rope attached to a stout limb. Jimmy was a fat little kid and couldn't climb the rope. He could swing on it though and often did so with gusto, especially if it appeared that the Carlsons weren't home. His swinging was often accompanied with a very authentic Tarzan yell.

Jimmy was a victim of several vices, these included overeating, which was to be expected since his mom was an excellent cook. Two other weaknesses Jimmy was prone to were pyromania, he love to play with fire, and the one most likely to get him in trouble was trash picking. One of his favorite places was our town's dump, a virtual treasure trove of wonder for a nine-year old with an over stimulated mind for "cool stuff."

The summer of 1961 was one of typical boredom for Jimmy and me. Our communities' one TV station, KEPR Channel 19, played nothing but soap operas during most weekdays between nine to four. Needless to say these weren't much to our liking. During those years most mothers kicked their kids out of the house during daylight hours. We were left to invent our own entertainment or just suffer from the boredom of having nothing to do.

Jimmy and I often wondered back and forth between his house and mine, usually taking the shortcut through the Carlson's back yard. In those days most families kept their garbage in galvanized metal garbage cans at the back of their homes. One day we were at Jimmy's house and decided it was time to go to my house. We walked to the gate in the Shirado's back fence and checked to see if the Carlsons were home. Luckily they weren't. The coast was clear and Jimmy ran and took a running leap and grabbed the climbing rope. His yell was very close to the most famous Tarzan of all, Johnny Weissmuller. If there had been any elephants nearby I'm sure they would have responded to his call.

After Jimmy's great swing, and subsequent touchdown, we continued our journey to my house. Just as we were passing the back of the Carlson's house Jim looked to the left and noticed the lid was off their garbage can. He said, "wait a minute, there's something in the garbage can." I told him to leave it alone. Since he was bigger than me I was grabbed and dragged by my shirt-sleeve to ascertain if there was a treasure in the Carlson's trash.

Jimmy was right. There was something of interest there. It looked like a typical red rubber hot water bottle that most families had at the time. There was something different about it though. Instead of the black threaded stopper that most hot water bottles had, this one had a fitting with a long red rubber hose coming out of it. At the end of the hose was a long slender black plastic tube about eight inches long with a series of holes in it. We stood and stared at it for a minute. I wasn't sure what it was for. Before I could ask Jimmy proudly proclaimed that he knew what it was. "It's a bagpipe," he said.

He grabbed it and threw the hot water portion of it under his arm and put the "flute" between his lips and off we marched. Jimmy was doing a great job of playing the bagpipe. He pumped the bag with his arm while fingering the holes on the flute. He even gave it greater authenticity by making very convincing bagpipe sounds as we marched down the Carlson's driveway and across Potter Street. I asked if I could play it but was soundly told no.

"It's mine, I found it", Jimmy said. Normally he would have slugged me but his preoccupation with the instrument spared me the pain.

We walked to the end of the court and up the sidewalk to my front door, looking very Scottish I must add. As we entered the house I could see my mom in the kitchen. She was standing at the sink with her back to us. I loudly announced to her, "Mom, look what we found, it's a bag pipe!"

She turned as we entered the kitchen. I was shocked and scared as I saw the anger in her eyes. She grabbed the apparatus from Jimmy and threw it in the garbage can beside our refrigerator. She shouted at us and said we were disgusting and told us to get out of the house.

We were bewildered. What had we done that was so grievous? We both attended Christ the King parochial school and were well aware of sin. Was what we had done sinful? If so was it a venial or mortal sin? Did this require confession? At nine years old we weren't well versed in the ways of the world. What had we done? Did we need to tell Father Sweeney?

As we walked back to Jimmy's house we noticed the Carlsons had returned home. Their car was in the driveway. We quickly walked past the side of their house. As we got to the back we saw Mrs. Carlson had a sack of groceries in her arms. Her back was to us and she was looking down at their garbage can. She looked up at us with a puzzled look. We said hello and hurried through their back yard, past the rope and through the gate to the safety of the Shirado's back yard. We quickly got over the trauma and were soon on to bigger and better things.

Years later, while at college I met and married a beautiful young lady named Pat Dyer. We received many wonderful wedding gifts. There was one special gift from Pat's mom. As Pat

opened it she let out an embarrassed little scream. She held it up and started to laugh. It was a hot water bottle with a long hose and a black tube on the end.

"I know what that is," I said, "It's a bag pipe."

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