

VIOLENCE ON TELEVISION

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As a child, Friday nights were wonderful. After Grandma and Granddaddy moved out, we always had pizza while we watched the CBS Friday Night Movie. This was a special night because Daddy was very excited about the movie. He had talked about it every day after work. And to celebrate, I got to drink an *entire* glass of Coke all by myself, not just a sip from Grandma's glass. Jo Ann, my new step mom, set the breakfast bar with napkins and paper plates nestled in bamboo holders. She filled my glass to the rim with Coke and popped open a beer for my daddy.

As the movie started, Daddy told me the about the movie again. He said *Walking Tall* was about a man from Arkansas. I didn't understand everything Daddy said about the movie, but he wanted me to be real quiet at the beginning so he could see if he recognized anything. Apparently, even though the man the movie was about was from Arkansas, the movie was filmed in Tennessee because the Arkansas man had worked there, or something like that. Even though I could look out the window to see Arkansas, I wanted to see it on television. I was really disappointed the Arkansas man was in Tennessee for the movie. Daddy continued to tell me about the movie as I ate, which is good, because I liked what he was saying more than the movie anyway.

I could tell he really liked the movie, so I was trying real hard to like it, too. I picked up another slice of pepperoni pizza and tried to follow the action, but with all the swiveling, I only caught glimpses for a while there. I would swivel back and forth in my bamboo barstool, which was way more fun. I would pick up the pizza, swivel toward the living room, take a bite, and swivel back to the bar, facing the kitchen, which was where Daddy and Jo Ann were sitting. Back and forth I went through another slice while Daddy and Jo Ann talked, about what, I couldn't say. It was grown up talk, like with Charlie Brown where the teacher always sounds like, "Waaa waaaa." Never made any sense and believe me, I tried really hard to listen sometimes.

I swiveled and ate and sipped my Coke. I can't pinpoint now when Daddy got mad, but when I heard Jo Ann say, "The next thing I know, you're gonna knock me off this stool," I swiveled toward the kitchen in time to watch him do just that. I picked up my glass, swiveled back toward the television, and began taking the longest drink of my life. I could hear Jo Ann crying, but I was fascinated with my maroon-colored glass. Well it wasn't "glass." It was plastic, and I could see the movie through it, but it was blurry and disjointed where the edges met the bottom. The caramel drink sloshed from side to side and back and forth and began to taste salty, but I kept the glass up, and watched the man from Arkansas get beaten up on television. When there was only slobbery salt left in the glass, I reached my arm around to put the glass down. I was done swiveling.

Somehow, although I have no recollection of it now, we all moved to the other end of the house and were now in the bedroom near the front door. Jo Ann yelled for me to call the police. I ran to the phone and picked up the handset before I realized I wasn't quite sure, at eight years old, just how to call the police. I looked at the dial and remembered that my phone number was MO-Hawk-something, and I knew that on TV they always dialed one number and yelled, "Get me the police!" The numbers swam in my vision. I didn't know which one was the special number. As I listened to the dial tone and stared at

the numbers, Jo Ann kept yelling for me to call the police while she and Daddy stood in the bedroom doorway, with the front door just beyond.

When Daddy saw me holding the phone, he started talking real sweet, saying, “Baby, you don’t want to call the police on Daddy. Put the phone down, baby.” I don’t recall putting the phone down, but I must have because the next thing I know I’m at the front door with Jo Ann holding one arm yelling, “Run to the neighbors and call Granddaddy!” and Daddy holding the other yelling, “You want to stay with Daddy, doncha, baby? You don’t wanna leave Daddy all alone, now do ya?”

Jo Ann managed to make it out the front door with part of me, but Daddy still had each of us in a firm grip, and he was pulling us back inside when the strap broke on Jo Ann’s purse. Time stopped as we all paused to watch the purse tumbling to the wooden porch, spilling the contents.

When Jo Ann yelled, “Run, Theresa, run!” I didn’t stop to think about it. I ran. But when she added “go to the neighbors” again, I had no idea what neighbors she meant, so I just ran. At first, I thought Jo Ann got away, too, but I never looked back to check. I’m not sure now if I was two houses away or two blocks away. I just picked the first house with the porch light on and knocked, or maybe banged, on the door. I asked the grey-haired man and woman if they would call my granddaddy to come pick us up.

“What’s the number, dear?” I’m sure the old lady or man asked, but I didn’t have a number. One of them asks his name, which I proudly stated, “Charlie Lee Grimes.” I tried to explain that my daddy was mad, and I need my granddaddy to pick me and Jo Ann up, that we live “down the street.”

The woman was heavy and squished me in a hug as her husband picked up the phone and began his adult talk. Some time later, hours or minutes—I can’t be sure—I saw my granddaddy’s brown Ford pickup truck pull up out front. Granddaddy got out, picked me up, and talked to the man, while I buried my face into his collar, breathing in the familiar Old Spice my granddaddy never failed to wear, day or night. Granddaddy shook the man’s hand saying, “Thank ya, neighbor.”

He carried me to the truck, sliding me into the middle next to Jo Ann because my place is in the middle next to Granddaddy. He put his arm around me and I snuggled into his crisp work shirt. He told me everything’s gonna be fine, but I started crying.

Jo Ann asked me, “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” I told her because I don’t want to tell her I left the dollar she gave me on the arm of the sofa and I was afraid Daddy might take it to buy beer.

The fog rolls through my memory of that night, and I don’t remember anything else. I do know that I never saw the end of *Walking Tall*, and I probably never will because, from what I saw of it, it was way too violent.

* **THERESA M. BOLEN** has lived in New Hampshire for the last eight years with her husband and three beautiful children. With their love and support, Theresa obtained a B.A. in English in 2004 at Rivier College. Currently, she is working towards her M.A./M.A.T in writing and teaching. In her free time, Theresa is polishing her first novel and writing the second.