

AMERICA'S DUMBEST CRIMINALS

FROM THE HIT TV SHOW



200 Wild & Wacky Stories of Fumbling Felons, Clumsy Crooks, and Ridiculous Robbers from the Hit TV Show

**DANIEL BUTLER, ALAN RAY,
& LELAND GREGORY**

America's
DUMBEST
CRIMINALS

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BASED ON TRUE STORIES FROM LAW ENFORCEMENT
OFFICIALS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

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The authors have taken great caution to protect the true identity of persons depicted in this book. While the crimes depicted are true, the names, gender, and races of the criminals depicted, and the details of the crimes portrayed, may have been changed to safeguard those identities.

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**To
the men and women whose portraits and photographs hang in
the lobby of every police station we visited— officers who were
killed in the line of duty. Under all the portraits and photos,
the same quote was displayed:**

“Greater love hath no man than this . . .”

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Introduction



The plans were all in place. The phone calls had all been made, the faxes sent, the interviews arranged and confirmed. Now the crew was on location, ready to set up and videotape our hilarious yet revealing interviews with police officers who had encountered America's dumbest criminals.

Time was money. With every moment, hundreds of expense dollars were clicking away. And here was the assistant chief of police, the man who had welcomed us so cordially the day before, giving us the kind of stern look that goes with "You're under arrest."

"You need to speak to the chief," he said.

We were ushered into a large office. Before us was a huge desk, and behind that desk was a very big man. To us, he looked like more than just an "authority figure"—he was the authority.

The chief did not smile. In that office no one smiled. And no one spoke but the chief.

"Explain to me," he said, "what it is you boys want to do."

Something in his tone made me think of every lie I had ever told. I swallowed. Then I launched into a nervous, chattering "pitch" for the home video series and book project we were trying to produce.

I explained that we had come to collect stories from the officers in his department about dumb criminals they had known. I told of my phone conversations and faxes to his assistant chief. I talked a little about our plans for a book and for television pilots.

As I spoke, I noticed a small plaque on the bookcase behind the chief's chair: "Treat the media as you would any other watchdog. Feed it, water it, pat it on the head, but never turn your back on it."

I finished my explanation. No one smiled. The silence seemed to last, oh, five to ten years. Finally, the chief spoke:

"Son, you need to understand something. You see, I was the interrogator on the Ted Bundy case. I went through that whole trial with the media. Then Hollywood sent me scripts for their movies-of-the-week and they asked me to circle whatever I thought was inaccurate. I circled a bunch of stuff and they went ahead and shot it just the way it was. Plus, in the last six months I've had two abortion-clinic shootings and I've had the media climbing all over my back every minute of every day.

"So tell me again," he said, "why I should let your cameras in here."

I saw our whole project teetering on a toothpick. I swallowed hard, opened my mouth, and miraculously, words came out.

“Chief, I’ve got two sons, seven and fifteen years old, and they love to watch television shows like *COPS*, *Rescue 911*, and *America’s Most Wanted*. They think those programs are accurate, that they show the way it is for cops and for criminals most of the time. They think the crime scene looks exciting, even glamorous.

“I don’t think that’s true. I think that even the term ‘Most Wanted’ glorifies the criminals—sort of like a rookie-of-the-year baseball card. And from the few interviews we’ve done already, I’m convinced there’s not much glorious about crime.

“In fact, I’m convinced that you police officers spend 90 percent of your time dealing with idiots—or with people just like me who have been caught doing the dumbest thing they’ve ever done. That’s what I want to show in our videos and in our book.”

This time the silence seemed to last ten to twenty years—without parole.

No one smiled. No one spoke. Except, finally, the chief.

“Son,” he said, his face relaxing into something like a smile, “if you’ll show criminals for the coldhearted dumbasses they are, and if you’ll show our police force as being professional at all times . . . well, then, we’ll help you any way we can.”

Over the next six months, this scene was repeated over and over. The stories were not all funny ones. With each officer that we interviewed, we felt the weight each one carries daily—the weight of pain and sadness and even fear. But police work, like any other stressful profession, is full of moments when situations take a turn for the absurd and when laughter seems as appropriate as tears. The most rewarding moments of this entire project came when the officers’ very serious faces broke into broad grins and we all laughed so hard that tears came to our eyes. We hope this book shares a little bit of that laughter.

We want to make it clear, however, that in laughing at “dumb criminals” we are not making fun of the mentally challenged. We use the term *dumb* in the same way that great American philosopher Forrest Gump used the word *stupid*: “Stupid is as stupid does, sir!” We say, “Dumb criminals are as dumb criminals do, sir!”

Dumb criminals, in other words, are criminals who *act* dumb—people who opt for selfishness, ignorance, greed, or just plain meanness instead of using the good sense God gave them. We take great satisfaction in showing the real and often hilarious consequences of such dumb choices.

None of the dumb crimes depicted in this book are still under adjudication. None of the criminals or victims described in this book are identified by their real names. All the stories really happened, but many details have been changed to protect the privacy of the people involved. The cops named in these pages, on the other hand, are very real. Their names and their stories are repeated with permission—and with deep gratitude. We wish them all the best as they continue to cope with the seemingly endless stream of America’s dumbest criminals.

America's
DUMBEST
CRIMINALS

WARNING:
THE CRIMES YOU ARE ABOUT TO READ ARE TRUE. THE NAMES HAVE
BEEN CHANGED ... TO PROTECT THE IGNORANT

Never Mind

When Detectives Ted McDonald and Adam Watson of the Brunswick (Georgia) Police Department answered this particular home burglary call, they expected a routine report—missing TVs and VCRs, an empty jewelry box, perhaps a hijacked coin collection. But they were in for a big surprise.

As the two detectives drove to the address the victim had given them over the phone, they came upon a nice house in a middle-class neighborhood not far from their own homes. It was about five-thirty in the afternoon, and the victim had obviously just gotten home from work.

“The man whose house had been robbed was very upset,” Watson remembers.

They could see where his sliding glass door had been pried open. It looked like an open-and-shut case of house burglary, one of several the officers had been tracking. But this victim introduced a new wrinkle in the crime spree.

“When we asked him if any belongings were missing from his home, he replied very quickly and indignantly that, yes, somebody had stolen his stash of marijuana. I looked at my partner in disbelief. We couldn’t believe our own ears, so we asked him again just to be sure.

“Could you repeat that, sir?”

The victim’s eyes got bigger as the cold, hard realization hit him. He had just admitted to a police officer that he possessed an illegal drug. He stammered for a moment in search of an out. There was none.

“Are you admitting to possessing marijuana?” the detectives asked. The man appeared to be frozen in time. He couldn’t take the words back, and he couldn’t think of any more to say.

“Sir? Is that what you’re telling us?”

“I . . . uh . . . well, no . . . not really,” the man stammered.

“Well, then, what are you saying?”

“Well . . . nothing, uh . . . I . . . oh, never mind,” the man said. “Just forget it.”

The officers turned and left as the man quietly closed the door, no doubt to sink into a chair and utter some expletives.

“We just left,” Watson says. “Without the dope, we really had no case against the man. But we had a good laugh on the guy. And believe it or not, we’ve had several calls like that one.”

The World's Shortest Trial

Officer David Hunter, retired from the Knox County (Tennessee) Sheriff's Department, told us this story of what might be the shortest trial in the history of jurisprudence:

At his criminal arraignment, the defendant stood before the judge.

"You are charged with the theft of an automobile," the judge said. "How do you plead?"

He expected to hear a simple "guilty" or "not guilty." Instead, the defendant tried to explain his whole defense as succinctly as possible.

"Before we go any further, judge," the accused man blurted out, "let me explain why I stole the car."

The judge's decision was made in record time!

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Look Out! He's Got a . . . What Is That?

Our research has shown not only that some criminals are dumb but also that some use fairly weird weapons. Some of the oddest weapons used: an index finger, an egg, a bowling ball, a wedge of cheese, an artificial leg, a twenty-one-pound turkey, a hot-fudge sundae, a banana, a frozen sausage, a lit cigarette, a one-and-a-half-pound Chihuahua, an insect, a snake, and a toilet seat.

We can just imagine a dumb criminal attempting an armed robbery with a wedge of Limburger.

“Give me your money, or I’ll cut the cheese!”

Positive I.D.

Detective Chris Stewart of the Brunswick (Georgia) Police Department told one of our *America's Dumbest Criminals* field reporters about a robbery suspect he transported back to the scene of the crime for a positive identification:

“We had gotten a call informing us that a woman had had her purse stolen from a shopping complex,” Stewart says. “A short time later, we saw a man who fit the description given to us by the victim. So we picked him up and took him back to the scene of the crime.”

Stewart explained to the suspect that they were going to take him back to the scene and that when they arrived he was to exit the vehicle and face the victim for a positive I.D. The man in custody heard this when the detective radioed ahead to the officer with the victim. Stewart said he had a man in custody who fit her description of the robber and they would be arriving shortly.

When they arrived at the scene, the suspect did exactly as he had been told. He stepped from the car and looked up at the victim. And before anyone could say anything, he blurted out, “Yeah, that’s her . . . that’s the woman I robbed.”

He has been given a new photo I.D. for his cooperation . . . and this one included a prison number.

Riches to Rags

Officer Brian Hatfield of Brunswick, Georgia, tells a sad story with a comical twist. He stopped a disheveled man behind the wheel of a fairly nice van that had sustained quite a bit of body damage. The driver had been weaving and was obviously a bit inebriated.

When Hatfield ran a check on the individual, he found several traffic warrants outstanding. So he brought the guy in for booking. The criminal didn't even have a dime for his phone call, much less the hundred dollars for bail. He called an attorney collect and then told Hatfield his sad tale.

"I won the Ohio lottery in April. Three million dollars."

"You won the lottery five months ago and you don't have a dime for a phone call?" Hatfield asked.

"I got the first installment, which was ninety-four thousand dollars. I went to Atlantic City and lost thirty thousand. Then I bought the van for thirty thousand, but I got drunk on some really good French wine and rolled the van."

According to Hatfield's calculations, the man had frittered away most of his first installment, but not all. "What did you do with the rest of the money?"

"Oh," he said, "I spent the other twenty-four thousand foolishly."

D.O.B.

Officer Glen Biggs of the Knoxville (Tennessee) Police Department had a close encounter of the dumb criminal kind when he was booking a suspect on a narcotics violation. A simple transcript of the interrogation tells it all:

Biggs: "What is your D.O.B.?"

Dumb Criminal: "What's a D.O.B., man?"

Biggs: "When's your birthday?"

Dumb Criminal: "May 5th."

Biggs: "What year?"

Dumb Criminal: "Every year, man."



The two customers headed back to their pickup, oblivious to the uniformed officers and the two marked police cruisers in the driveway.

Drive Around, Please

J. D. Roberts has a colorful past. He has served as a member of the army's elite Delta Force and as a narcotics agent for the Drug Enforcement Agency. He has even worked security for some of Hollywood's top action-adventure celebrities. He now uses his expertise and experience as an instructor at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Brunswick, Georgia. When we asked him if he had ever run into any dumb criminals, one incident immediately came to his mind.

One night Roberts was involved in a raid on a drug house that was doing a brisk business in marijuana sales. He and the other agents were dressed in black "battle" fatigues with "Narcotics Agent" stenciled on them. Local uniformed officers in marked police cruisers also took part in the raid.

Roberts and his team easily entered the house and apprehended the suspect. Several hundred pounds of marijuana were confiscated without incident. Within minutes, the officers were collecting evidence and finishing up at the scene.

As Roberts started out the front door, he noticed a pickup truck parked behind one of the marked police cruisers in front of the house. Two long-haired individuals got out of the pickup and strolled past the police cruisers parked in the driveway, then walked up to Roberts and his partner.

"Hey man, he still selling pot?"

Roberts looked at his partner, then back at the guy. "Yeah, he is. Just go around and knock on the back door."

"Cool." The two men nodded and walked on.

Roberts watched in amazement as the two individuals sauntered around to the rear of the house. Roberts radioed the officers still inside the house that they had customers at the back door.

The uniformed officers inside quickly hid while one plainclothes detective answered the door. The new customers asked where the old owner was, and the officer explained that the owner had stepped out but that he could help them.

They requested a fifty-dollar bag of marijuana. The officer went to the next room, grabbed a handful from the four hundred pounds of pot they had just confiscated and stuffed it into a plastic bag. The two customers were ecstatic. They thanked the officer for his generosity.

Roberts and his partner were still in the driveway, still wearing the black battle fatigues with "Narcotics Agent" stenciled on their chests, when the two customers headed back to their pickup, oblivious to the uniformed officers and the two marked police cruisers in the driveway.

Finally, Roberts walked up to the two satisfied customers and arrested them. The agents reconfiscated the dope and impounded the pickup—just as another prospective

customer pulled up.

Roberts decided this was too easy to ignore. “We moved the two cruisers and started putting the impounded vehicles in the back. We made about fourteen more sales and arrests that night. By the time we were through, the backyard was filled with cars. It was the darnedest impromptu sting I’ve ever seen.”

8

The Considerate Criminal

Working the front desk at a police station on a Saturday night is one of the most harrowing and maddening jobs imaginable. An officer can easily get behind in his duties when the phone is constantly ringing, prisoners are going in and out of the jail, paperwork is piling up, traumatized victims and witnesses are being herded through the hallways, and the miscellaneous weird people are wandering in. Bob Ferguson, an Indiana cop now retired, was working the desk on just such a night.

“A guy comes in around two o’clock in the morning and says, ‘I’m wanted for robbery in Illinois, and I wanted to turn myself in,’” Ferguson says. “It just so happened that the desk I was working was located in Indiana. It was a crazy night, and there were a lot more pressing problems at hand than this guy. We were booking a rather violent guy on narcotics, and I had drunk teenagers throwing up in the lobby. Not to mention a prostitution sting that was processing about three hookers and five johns every ten minutes.”

In the confusion, the officer blurted out, “That’s all well and good, but I’m kind of busy. Either go to Illinois or come back at six.” And at six o’clock on the dot, the man came back and turned himself in.

Bob Ferguson told the man how much he appreciated his punctuality “. . . then I politely booked him.”