

Skunk Works Telecom

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It was late in the afternoon toward the end of June. My older brother had left a half hour earlier to deliver newspapers. I was carving a stick in the living room thinking I should pick up my mess before Mom saw it when the phone rang. Mom's usual smile changed briefly to a "what?" followed by the "you've got to be kidding" face before settling into one of those scowls reserved specifically for errant children.

"Who was that, Mom?" I asked ready to deny any wrong doing.

"That was Mrs. Schuman. She called to warn me that Michael is bringing home a skunk."

Whoa. Mom had called him "Michael" instead of "Mike." This was serious. There was an ominous timbre in her voice that any other time would have sent shivers up my spine. Any fear and trembling though, was quickly overcome by the words "bringing home a skunk." How cool is that!

I had visions of my older brother having to burn his clothes and sleep outside until the smell wore off. I quickly gathered up every harsh cleaning chemical I could find along with a scrub brush and dashed out the front door. Dropping everything near the driveway, I ran to grab the garden hose. I turned the water on full blast and returned to stand beside my cleaning supplies. I was ready. I waited.

In a short few minutes Mike came careening around the corner onto our street. His newspaper bags were missing from his bike. In the crook of his left arm he held a Folgers 5lb. coffee can with a plastic lid on top. He skidded to a stop, tossing his bike away from him as he lept to the ground and ran into the garage.

"I thought you had a skunk." I yelled after him. I ran to catch up to him in the garage.

"I do. Grab your bike. I need your help," he said catching his breath. He placed the coffee can on the floor in the corner of the garage.

"Where is it?" I asked. I walked over to see what he was doing and caught the faint odor of skunk.

"It's in the can," He said.

"Are you kidding? That's too small!" I bent over to look and could see a dark shape slightly moving beneath the semi-transparent lid.

"It's just a baby. I saw it walking in the gutter up the street in front of Mrs. Schuman's house. I asked her if she had a container I could have and she gave me the coffee can. I'm going to keep

it for a pet. Now quit gabbing. I need your help. It's getting late and I still have half my papers to deliver. We'll tell Mom when we get back."

He was already headed back to his bike so I ran to get mine and catch up. "I think she already knows." I yelled from the garage.

"How'd she find out?" Mike asked

"Mrs. Schuman called, I think." We were already out on the street and around the corner pedaling hard.

We soon arrived at Mrs. Schuman's where Mike's newspaper bags still lay on the curb where he had dropped them. She was watching from the front porch. "Is everything all right?" she yelled.

"Hi Mrs Schuman," I yelled back.

"Yeah. I just need to finish my route," Mike answered simultaneously.

"What did your mother say?"

"Oh it's okay," he lied optimistically. "See you later. Here Dan, You take that side of the road and I'll take this. You need to put them by the front door."

As I looked in the direction we were headed, it seemed that at every house still awaiting delivery there was some one standing by the front door or out near the drive way. Even with the good weather this seemed a little odd. Glancing back where Mike had already delivered papers, there was no one around. As we started down the street all eyes were upon us. At the first house I rode up to, a middle aged man yelled from the open front door, "Don't come over. Just throw the paper from the curb." I did as asked and headed over to get the next paper from Mike. He was getting similar treatment from the house on that side of the street. In fact, for the remaining 60 houses in the route, we were told either to throw the paper over or to leave it on the sidewalk and they would get it when we left.

After about 10 houses, Mike said "They know about the skunk."

"How" I asked.

"I don't know, but that's why they're doing this," Mike replied

"How could they find out that fast? How could everyone know?"

That was nearly 40 years ago. In the past 10 years cell phones, the internet, and applications like Instant Messaging and "Twitter" have made high speed communications common place. Yet with all the latest technology, I have still never seen any thing as fast or efficient as Mrs. Schuman.