

# SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL

## GETTING ROBBED KINDA SUCKS, WRITES JAMES CULIC



**JAMES CULIC**  
Column

As the trio of police officers finished gathering evidence and taking photos in my kitchen, the detective turned to me and said, "So, you're that reporter with the newspaper, yeah?"

I told him I was indeed that guy.

"Do me a favour, would ya?" he said. "Give me a couple weeks to solve this thing before you write about it."

I got robbed. Or, I guess, technically I got burgled. It's only a robbery if someone is there at the time of the crime, but since my house was empty save for my kitty Zelda, it was a burglary, not a robbery. It very nearly was a robbery though. The thieving home invader who has been hitting houses all over the north end of Fort Erie is a daytime burglar. He busts in when good folk like me are out working for a living. I got home early that day, around 4:30 p.m. and the police figure the burglary happened around

3:30 p.m.

This dastardly daytime delinquent went in through our bedroom window, rifled through our possessions, and walked right out the front door with a garbage bag full of our stuff slung over his shoulder like some kinda evil reverse-Santa from the South Pole. He got my wife's laptop, some jewelry, my collection of wrist-watches (including my rare Sega Dreamcast commemorative watch) and he stole one on my USB keys that had some sweet Kanye West albums on it.

I think my wife was surprised that I wasn't angrier about the whole ordeal, but once I was informed the burglar was almost certainly stealing this stuff to pay for drugs, I wasn't really angry so much as I was... sad?

I felt sympathy for this guy more than anything. Nobody wants to break into homes and steal stuff. You do that when you are desperate. You do that when you are struggling with an addiction so powerful it makes you do things nobody wants to do.

As much as this burglar has failed decent society, we have failed him by not demanding our governments do more to combat addiction, do more to offer access to mental health services, do more to help

those stuck in the prison industrial complex.

We should have done more to help John. That's the name of the guy who broke into my house; allegedly, I should say for legal reasons, since he hasn't had his day in court yet, but at this point it looks like a pretty cut-and-dry case.

I should also say, the Niagara regional police did a great job here, and they were an absolute pleasure to work with. They were quick to respond after the initial crime, did an exhaustive search and evidence collection (they found a footprint on the air conditioner outside the bedroom window) and the detective kept us up to speed on our missing stuff with regular email updates.

I honestly thought the detective was just being optimistic when he said he was confident they would arrest the suspect soon, but sure enough, they had him in cuffs only a few weeks later. Unfortunately our stolen stuff wasn't recovered; likely already traded or sold to feed an addiction.

It's a somewhat unsatisfying conclusion to the whole sad saga. I hope this guy John feels bad about stealing my stuff, and I hope he gets whatever help he needs.

I also hope he stops robbing people. Or, I guess,



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As much as the man who burgled homes in Fort Erie failed society, society has failed him, writes James Culic.

burglarizing. I've never been robbed, but my wife has actually.

It was 12 years ago, she was working the cash register at the old Ontario Bakery in Fort Erie and just before closing time, some guy came in, flashed a knife at her, and stole all the cash.

They caught the guy

shortly after. His name? John. We doubled checked both police reports and sure enough, it was him.

That's right: the same guy. The same guy who robbed my wife, randomly broke into her house more than a decade later and stole a bunch of her stuff.

OK, I've changed my mind. Whatever sympathy

I had for this guy is gone. Lock him up and throw away the key.

*James Culic is Niagara this Week's regular weekly columnist and he just bought some new security cameras for his house. Email him at [jculic@niagarathisweek.com](mailto:jculic@niagarathisweek.com) or holler on Twitter @jamesculic.*

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# CHASING TALL TALES AT THE SECRET BUFFALO BILLS TAILGATE PARTY

NOT EVERY STORY TIES ITSELF UP IN A NICE BOW, WRITES JAMES CULIC



JAMES CULIC  
Column

A good story always piques my interest, and for years I'd been hearing about a good story in Fort Erie.

Word on the street was that there was a secret gathering of Fort Erie's elite and powerful at an exclusive little pre-game tailgate party at Buffalo Bills home games. Fort Erie dudes have been going to these games for, supposedly, decades now, and you have to be "in the know" to get into this secret shindig.

I'd long known that former mayor Doug Martin was a huge Bills fan, and had heard whispers that he went to every game, including the secret tailgate party too. It sounded like a good story, and I'd never been to an NFL game before, so this year I decided to find a cheap pair of tickets for me and the wife and see if I could find this clandestine slice of Fort Erie south of the border.

Step one was finding out where exactly this tailgate party happened, because

while lots of people I talked to knew about it, no one was able to give me any solid leads on where the damn place actually was.

While at the local YMCA a few weeks back, some dudes in the locker-room were talking about going to a Bills game, so I interjected. I told them I had tickets to a game also, and had heard about a cool Fort Erie tailgate party. They guys looked around sorta nervously, until one of them gave a quick nod of approval, and then they told me that, yeah, it was a real thing, and they go there before games.

Finally. My first solid lead. I asked where the place was, and said I'd like to go because I heard there was a secret "old boys club" of guys who always go to the games.

"Oh yeah, mayor Doug Martin and all those guys are always there," he told me. "There's like a group of 10 of them and I heard they haven't missed a single Bills home game in 20 years."

He went on to explain more of what I had already heard: that it was a house near the stadium, that it was all Fort Erie folks, and it's a bit cliquish and you gotta know someone who knows someone to get in.

Unfortunately, the guy's intel ended there, and he didn't know the address; couldn't even tell me what street the house was on. All

he could tell me is that it was a white house with blue shutters, and it was "to the left of the stadium," whatever that means.

After another few weeks of poking around, I still hadn't come across the address for this place, but I was pointed to another local guy who allegedly could fill me in. I got connected with this guy and got most of the same story.

"Yeah I know the place, where Dougie Martin and all them guys go. There's a group of like 20 of them and I heard they haven't missed a Bills home game in 30 years," he said. "I don't know the address but I think it's on Southwestern Boulevard. You'll see the house: it's white and has blue shutters."

That was as much info as I managed to get before last weekend's Bills game arrived, so we set out. With not much else to go on, we headed over the bridge on Sunday and planned to just sorta drive around this road near the stadium, looking for a white house with blue shutters.

We drove all up and down that damn street and were ready to give up when we saw an unassuming white house, with, what could maybe be considered blue shutters (my wife said they were actually teal) so we pulled over.

"We're full, sorry," said the guy standing in the driveway. I told him I was



James Culic/Metroland

I spent Sunday looking for a secret Fort Erie tailgate party at the Buffalo Bills game.

from Fort Erie, and was looking for the place where all the other Fort Erie people were. "Yeah, this is the place. We can find room for you."

We parked and went in to find it was largely as advertised: a pretty nice little private tailgating party at a house directly across the street from the stadium. There was one problem though: I didn't see Doug Martin, or any of the other Fort Erie bigwigs I had heard would be there. Maybe I wasn't in the right place after all, because I didn't recognize too many Fort Erie people either. Just

then, I spotted a prominent dude I know from town, Scott, who waved me over.

"Hey James, we were just talking about you," said Scott. "About how your house got robbed, that's crazy." So I was in fact in the right spot. I asked about the place and the alleged elites who pull the levers of Fort Erie power from this very tailgating party. "Oh yeah, mayor Doug Martin and all those guys; I heard they haven't missed a home game in 15 years."

Success, I had finally found the story that I had been hearing rumours

about for years.

"But they're not here today, I heard they went down to Florida this week instead," said Scott.

So that was that. Not every story comes to a satisfying conclusion with a clever zinger to cap things off. Sometimes you chase a story, and it just, kinda ... ends.

*James Culic is Niagara this Week's regular weekly columnist and he won't give you the address of the secret tailgate party. Email him at [jculic@niagarathisweek.com](mailto:jculic@niagarathisweek.com) or holler on Twitter @jamesculic.*

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# RISING LAKE WATERS ARE GOOD FOR NIAGARA'S ENVIRONMENT

ONCE WATERFRONT HOMEOWNERS ARE INCONVENIENCED, WE'LL SEE CLIMATE ACTION, WRITES JAMES CULIC



JAMES CULIC  
Column

mental activists, tree huggers, turtle lovers - are sounding the enviro-alarm about climate change and how Lake Erie and Lake Ontario are dangerously high and are causing flooding all across Niagara and how that's a sign of bad things to come and that man made changes to our ecosystem is a serious danger to our future and blah blah blah.

The long and short of it is this: flooding along Lake Erie and Lake Ontario's shorelines are good for the environment in the long run.

Why? Because change only happens when it suits rich people. And where do rich people live? Along the shoreline.

Climate change has been adversely affecting regular people for decades. But now, flooding along Lake Erie is getting bad enough that it's posing problems for the wealthy lakefront homeowners who live along Niagara's sunny southern

If you took all the water out of Lake Superior, and dumped it across the entire land mass of North and South America, it would flood both continents to a depth of 30 centimetres. There's a lot of water in the Great Lakes. So much that it's kinda impossible to really comprehend. But this summer is giving us a glimpse of just how much water those lakes hold, and what happens when those limits are stretched.

Lots of people - environ-



James Culic/Torstar

Lake Erie is slowly swallowing the Point Abino Lighthouse.

coast. The same could be said for Lake Ontario.

That's a good thing because now something will finally get done about this problem. That sounds a bit harsh, but it's true.

Take a drive down the streets of one of Niagara's fancy rich neighbourhoods and count the number of potholes you notice; then do the same thing in a neighbourhood where working class people live and see if you can spot the difference. They say the

squeaky wheel gets the grease, but the wheel with a seven-figure bank account gets the grease and also a chrome finish, spinning rims, and a butler who shines it twice daily.

Nothing gets done until it benefits rich people in some way, then they turn around and act like heroes for finally doing something about it. That's why I always kinda thought Christopher Reeve was a jerk. Everyone always praised him for donating millions

of dollars to spinal cord research, but he only did that after he himself was paralyzed by a spinal cord injury. Reeve did a lot of good work and his money helped advance our knowledge of spinal cord injuries, but he didn't donate any money to spinal cord research until it stood to personally benefit him.

That's basically where we are at with climate change: rich people are about to be thrown from their high horse and will soon be scrambling to do something to stop the rising flood waters from drowning their swank shore-front luxury homes.

This weekend I rode my bike out to the infamous Point Abino Lighthouse, which meant going through the private gated community of the absurdly wealthy who own that pristine stretch of our waterfront. The water levels there are noticeably higher than normal, to the point they've closed access to the

lighthouse since the walkway leading to it is several inches below water. Right now it's just the lighthouse, but in a few years the water levels could be nipping at the toes of these rich dudes' front doors. That's when something might get done about rising flood waters and climate change.

Not that it will matter. Because within a few decades, every other country will have poisoned their freshwater supply with pollution and the Great Lakes will quickly become ground zero for the impending water wars. By then, we'll long for the days when a slightly wet walkway to the lighthouse was the worst of our lakefront problems.

*James Culic is Niagara this Week's regular weekly columnist, and he's not investing in waterfront property any time soon. You can email him at [jculic@niagarathisweek.com](mailto:jculic@niagarathisweek.com) or holler on Twitter @jamesculic.*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### A BEAUTIFUL TRIBUTE

*Re. Mom lived a full life, Niagara Farmers' Monthly, July:*

Carla Carlson's column on her mother's remarkable life was beautifully

written, and so revealing. Those of us who have lived in Niagara for some time know of the people mentioned and places where the family lived, whether in St. Catharines, Vineland, or on Decew Road across from Lake Gibson, or beyond. The column was infused

with love for a hardy activist, of course, but was also so informed about the history of the places.

A wonderful read.  
GAIL BENJAFIELD  
ST. CATHARINES

### CLEAN UP AFTER HORSES

Recently, a large group

of horses were ridden down the path along the Niagara Parkway.

Though they were fun to watch, the amount of poop they left on the path was not nice to see.

They did the same last year and now for the next few weeks it is not fun to walk on the pathway. After

all, horse poop is not small. Not knowing where they were from, I'm hoping seeing it in the paper might prompt someone clean up after them next time.

You must clean up after your dog, so surely you should also have clean up after your horses or go somewhere where people do not

walk or ride their bikes.  
LINDA HARGREAVES  
NIAGARA-ON-THE-LAKE

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