

## Crime Wave (2014)

Houston Hodges, for Writer's Corner, WLRH Radio Huntsville, AL USA

I'm going to tell you about the worst thing I ever did. Actually, I'm not. I'm going to tell you about the worst thing I'm going to tell you that I ever did.

It was vagrancy, pure and simple. It was loitering, it was trespassing, it was downtown in Littlefield, Texas, and I was sixteen years old. Maybe seventeen. The gang of four was out hootin' and hollerin', my three buddies and I, all in high school, downtown prowling about long after hours -- but that was before there was such a thing as hours. It may have been eleven o'clock at night, maybe even midnight. We'd finished "dragging Phelps Avenue," cruising up and down in someone's parents' car, trying and failing to get up enough nerve to actually speak to young ladies similarly engaged, so we parked the car and started wandering around behind the stores of the business district, all four blocks of it. We were up to no good, except that we didn't yet know what that might be.

Then we saw him, through the opening at the end of the block: the portly figure of Ernest Walraven, town constable, who represented The Law in Littlefield, Texas in 1945. Ernest Walraven was an Army veteran, a man of sober demeanor, totally untrained in the finer points of criminal justice, but he was The Law.

We froze. There was one of those long instants when your future flashes before you, the years in a prison uniform, viewing the world through iron bars, we saw it clearly. Then one of us said -- it may have been I, I cannot remember, but I still hear those words, as clear as yesterday: "There's Mr. Walraven." "MISTER Walraven." Not "the police," not "the cops," certainly not "the fuzz." We departed quickly and quietly... and (need I add?) successfully.

I feel better after confessing. We may have been nearly overtaken by depravity, almost beyond the pale of civilized behavior, those four midnight prowlers of old...but we had manners.

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The Rev. Houston Hodges preaches against youthful deprivations and other vices at the Big Cove Presbyterian Church out in the Hampton Cove area.