

# ||| WE ARE ALL ||| ||| CRIMINALS |||

One in four people in the U.S. has a criminal record.  
**This is the other 75%.**

Participants in We Are All Criminals tell stories of crimes they got away with. The stories range from humorous to humbling, but all have one thing in common: they are privately held memories without public stigma. Each shows that often times the only thing separating *clean* from *criminal* is who gets caught.

## PRIVATE MEMORY: BURGLARY



There was a beverage company on the outskirts of town which functioned as the liquor distribution center for the region. My best friend and I were the ringleaders. We assigned everyone a duty, reserving the least culpable positions for ourselves, just in case. I was hunkered down in the woods, watching the squad car.

In 30 minutes, we got eight cases of beer and 20 bottles of liquor. It doesn't sound like a lot now, but it was a really big deal then. We waited three months to throw a party. It was out in the field, everyone came.

**You know what's interesting? Those were transferable skills. The plotting, attention to detail, execution, delayed gratification. Maybe it's no surprise that we are now police chiefs, college professors, coaches, nurses, and victims' advocates.**

## PUBLIC RECORD: FELONY THEFT

He had sent out hundreds of applications over the last year -- including four to the same computer chain store from which he eventually stole. He had the same education and experience as his white classmates, each of whom had been hired. Although the "now hiring" signs were still up, rejections (or worse, no responses) collected alongside his mom's overdue bills. So he put his skills to use.

He made devices to cut locks and a program to wipe identifying information from the loot. He was an electronics whiz and was growing his people skills recruiting others to help.

He was stopped after the first boost; his white accomplices made out with way more than he, but mall security walked through them like they were invisible.

With the lock cutter and the value of the one gadget he was caught with, he was charged with a felony. He pleaded guilty, which meant he couldn't go back to his mom's without risking her and his siblings' evictions. His applications for college had to be revised and the rejections came quickly. And, because he lives in a state where they can ask about criminal charges on applications, he's checking that little black box. Every time, he feels like he's x-ing out his future.

## WAAC THANKS:

Thanks to Lynnhurst UCC in South Minneapolis for hosting the We Are All Criminals exhibit this month. For information on the gallery's hours, click [here](#).

## ON THE DOCKET:

||| HIRED Staff Training |||  
St. Paul, MN 2.4

||| American Constitution Society |||  
Minneapolis, MN, 2.5

||| League of Women Voters |||  
St. Paul, MN, 2.18

||| Macalester College |||  
Minneapolis, MN, 2.19

||| Boston College |||  
Chestnut Hill, MA, 2.21

||| ABA Collateral Consequences  
Summit |||  
Washington, D.C., 2.27

## IN THE NEWS: THE HIGH COST OF A PUBLIC RECORD

[New research](#) indicates that nearly 1 in 3 people in the U.S. has a public record, many with only minor offenses or arrests without convictions. As a result of easy and instant access to such records as well as the collateral consequences they trigger, the Center for American Progress now asserts that a criminal record is "both a direct cause and consequence of poverty." Lack of access to employment, housing, public assistance, education, family reunification and mounting court fines and debts faced by those with a record affect us all: the national poverty rate would have dropped by 20% between 1980 and 2004 if not for mass incarceration and collateral consequences. Additionally, the U.S. spends more than \$80 billion per year to incarcerate people -- the vast majority of them for non-violent offenses -- and the cost of employment losses among those with records is as much as \$65 billion per year in terms of GDP.

See what collateral consequences exist where you live using the American Bar Association's [inventory](#), and two excellent resources from Margaret Colgate Love: [Collateral Consequences Resource Center](#) and the [Restoration of Rights Project](#).

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READ THE FULL STORY AND GET INVOLVED AT: [www.weareallcriminals.org](http://www.weareallcriminals.org)

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