

PALO ALTO ODYSSEY

Carl considers an unusual new career

CARL laughed at the idea of pursuing a career burglarizing houses in Palo Alto. Now that his third start-up had failed, he was thrashing around for a job.

As a teenager, growing up on the Peninsula, Carl had done some burglaries, and found, as a kid, it wasn't a bad way to make money — providing you didn't get caught. With a 13-year-old friend, he had stolen televisions, VCRs, radios, and some jewelry; and fenced them at pawnshops in San Francisco and Oakland.

Carl's father had been a tightwad, who told him to get a job. So Carl had cut lawns, and then worked at McDonald's. But he found burglary more exciting and more lucrative, with better hours and offering more leisure time.

Carl's father was an orphan who

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grew up in foster homes, who kept telling Carl to go to school, but who had no advice about what the boy might do after. The father was a man who just loved going to school.

Surprisingly, Carl's father had become a physician late in life as a second career, but not a very good one. In the workplace he was dangerous as a clinician. He liked to play the expert, and demonstrate how he already knew the material, acting out his childhood trauma of being excluded.

"Just win scholarships," the doc had said to his son, although the subtext message was that Carl was not good enough to achieve that. Carl wondered if he'd passed this fatherly criticism along to his own son Toby. He feared that he had.



CARL

"Be a success," his father had said to Carl. "That is the most important thing. Don't disappoint me."

But Carl felt his father's key message was that he had already disappointed him, and probably would continue to do so. How was he supposed to deal with that?

At any rate, the house burglary

idea kept coming back into his mind. He'd seen a suspicious guy that week walking through his Southgate neighborhood, appearing to scope out the houses. When Carl had looked at the fellow, the young man immediately became engrossed in his cellphone, reading posts and texting, or pretending to.

"Clever," thought Carl. "That gives the fellow an excuse for stopping in front of a house to scope it out, while pretending to text. Maybe even take a photo or two."

"The technology of burglary has advanced," mused Carl. "I could do that. The trick is how to make it lucrative."

More tomorrow.