

Bourne toWrite...

creative writing
workshops

Johnny

by Richard Lewis

There was a grim inevitability that Johnny's wild ride against authority would come to a violent end. He died the way he had lived, gunned down in a lonely alleyway.

Ann Sage, the woman who betrayed him for the reward money, told the FBI she'd be wearing an orange dress when accompanying Johnny to the Biograph cinema, but on exiting, the lights made the dress appear red, which created confusion and the Feds nearly missed their chance.

As they left the cinema, Johnny quickly sensed he was being followed and ducked, darting down a blind alley. Police said they'd called out, "stop or we'll shoot," but there was never any desire to take him alive. Better to save the cost of a big court case.

No one really knew what had made Johnny bad, though many could hazard a guess; some saying he never had a chance, brought up on the restless streets of Indianapolis during the hungry years of the great depression, but it seems he was determined to get noticed one way or another, after all he'd had little positive attention at home, having a mother who'd died when he was three and a father who would swing from being overly strict to overly lax, no doubt instilled in the youngster a sense of injustice at the world; then later with a jealous step brother dishing out regular beatings, followed by guilt money for sweets, probably only compounded his resentment and distrust, so maybe that's when he started his running, first from his father and brother, then later from the cops.

You'd never have guessed in those early days that Johnny would acquire such notoriety. Progressing from delinquent behaviour, petty crime, to hapless villain who, after a bungled mugging incident, managing to give himself away. This first conviction, having had no defence lower, got him ten to twenty at the state penitentiary. The judge deciding to throw the book at him, no doubt only adding fuel to Johnny's sense of injustice.

At the university of crime he studied the science of bank robbery and formed a bond with career criminals, who helped him plan a daring breakout.

Johnny thought to himself, 'now they're going to see who I am.'

There were bleak prospects for success in the straight world anyway, what with the dire state of the economy, grinding poverty and high unemployment. America's river of plenty was flowing backwards but still a belief in wealth, fame and excitement awaited the bandit. His gang raided a police armoury, equipping themselves with machine guns and bullet proof vests and terrorised the Midwest, killing ten men. They

robbed banks and grocery stores and over the course of a year between 1933 and 1934 amassed \$500,000, a fortune during the depression years.

A romanticised myth grew around Johnny, as if he was robbing the hated bankers and giving to the poor, like some latter-day Robin Hood. The gang became celebrities, posing with newspaper reporters, which finally led to their downfall as the newly formed FBI distributed posters offering a \$10,000 reward.

Johnny had earned the title, 'Public Enemy Number 1'.

