

# THE CANONIZATION OF BILLY JACKSON

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*A Story*

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## The Canonization of Billy Jackson



I first met Billy Jackson when I was in 7th grade. He was a skinny blonde boy who stood out in class because not only was he the only blonde kid in class, but he had the meanest streak of any person I had ever met – boy or girl.

It was my first year in junior high and it just so happened that I had never had a white classmate during my segregated elementary school years. During those elementary years I had met many Garcias, Garzas, Rubios, and Cantus just to name a few, but I had never met a Jackson. Of course, Billy was not the only white classmate I had that junior high year. There were Andy Smith, Robert Wilkes, Henry Bowens, Julie Keller, and Kimberly Sanders just to name a few of my other new classmates. However, in all fairness, these other new classmates were pretty nice kids. They were just as easy going and polite as the other white kids I had seen on television. Robert Wilkes was our school quarterback that year and he was very likeable. Kimberly Sanders was in my English class, and she was always sharing her school supplies with all of us kids from the old barrio because we never seemed to have enough supplies when it came down to having writing material in Mr. Taylor's class. She bailed me out of after-school detention countless times. And Julie Keller was, without a doubt, the prettiest girl in school with her dark hair, light skin, and the bluest eyes in the world. Best of all, she was not conceited.

Billy Jackson was a whole different story. He stood out in class not only for his natural bleach blonde hair, which none of us barrio kids had, but his temper was bad, really bad. By the time the first month of school had passed Billy had been sent to the office at least three times a week and it seemed he was sent for breaking every rule in the schoolbook at least once. He would fight with students, teachers, and even with the principal. He stole a brand-new basketball from Coach Everly's office and took off running after school with the coach running after him but he got away. The following day he was absent from school, but when he returned, he acted as if he hadn't done anything wrong. Billy had a P.E. class with Coach Everly during the last period of the day but instead of going to class he skipped it and went home early. It was early April, but Billy never returned to his gym class. Coach Everly did not even try to get him back in class. He must have figured it was better to let him keep the basketball and have him out of class than to fight for the basketball and have him return to class. Truth be told, class ran much more smoothly without Billy there.

The school administration surmised that Billy was not a very nice student, but we students definitely knew he was not a very nice person at all. When the school officials were out of sight, Billy's secret bad side really showed itself and it was downright scary. Billy was a great intimidator. He could and would scare us kids with one mean look. Even though Billy was a 12-year-old 7th grader he would fight any of the other school kids just to prove he wasn't afraid of anyone. He got into several fights during the school year and won each one easily. When Mrs. Roberts, his English teacher, asked him why he was always getting into fights he answered, "Only I know why I do as I do."

Perhaps the most stunning fight of the school year (and there were plenty) was when Billy got into a fight with a big 8th grade football player who thought Billy had made a nasty comment about his girlfriend. He pushed Billy in the cafeteria and Billy fell over a table and onto the floor on the opposite side. Like a tiger, Billy leaped back over the table and punched the big boy squarely on the nose, making him bleed profusely all over the cafeteria floor. Even though Billy was not as big as the other boy he was much quicker. With reflexes as fast as a cat he punched the big boy on his bloody nose and wouldn't stop until a school custodian stepped in and saved the bigger boy. Billy was suspended for the rest of the week, but everyone knew that in this particular case, it was not totally Billy's fault.

Things didn't get much better when we were all in the 8th grade. Billy grew to a height of nearly 6 feet, and he was even more intimidating than ever. His manners did not improve, and it was only due to a fact that my friends and I hung in a group that Billy did not mess with us. I guess he figured that if he messed with any of us it would be like messing with a hornet's nest. He was probably right since we were a close group of friends who were not about to let one bully intimidate us. We also knew that none of us stood a chance against Billy in a one-on-one fight. However, all the other kids were easy pickings for the undisputed school bully.

He often took cafeteria food away from other kids during lunch. This terrible habit eventually became so routine that it was not uncommon for some kids to offer their dessert to him just so Billy would think of them as being cool and not pick on them. He was the undisputed king of the moochers, but he did not care. He loved being the intimidator. Billy really was the most terrifying kid in junior high.

Billy remained a loner during the high school years. He somehow managed to keep his grades high enough to get himself promoted to the next grade year after year. His energetic persona never eased up for even a minute. The high school coach lamented that Billy did not play football because he could see

that Billy's boundless energy would have made him a great linebacker. And by his senior year he was a good 6'2" and weighed a solid 220 lbs.

Perhaps the saddest commentary for the school was that the football team made the playoffs that year and it even went several rounds deep into the state playoffs before losing to the eventual state champion by only three points. The school's quarterback was a kid named Wesley Brown, and he was supposed to be one of the most sought-after quarterbacks in the nation. It seemed that every major college in the nation wanted to sign Wesley, but it was not meant to be. One day while Wesley and a few other football players were tossing the football around in a friendly game of touch football Billy showed up and invited himself into the game. The football players were an easy-going group of guys and didn't mind letting Billy join but his brash and reckless style of play soon made them all regret they had allowed him to join them.

During a simple play Wesley dropped back to pass the ball, and he threw a perfect pass for a touchdown. However, Billy came rushing in after him and threw himself at the quarterback's knees way after the ball had left his hand. Billy hit Wesley so hard that Wesley's leg was broken in two places. Wesley would never play football again. Billy never apologized for his hit on Wesley and instead insisted that it was all a part of the game. Billy would explain any criticism by often repeating, "Real men understand me and they also understand why I do as I do."

Wesley spent 2 long weeks in the hospital and when he returned to school he hobbled around with the help of a cane. It was sad to see such a fine young man hobble around so slowly after seeing him sprint like a cheetah from one end of the football field to another. But we all move on and so did Wesley. Billy was not punished by the school because the tackle was labeled an accident.

Life has a funny way of evening things out and it did just that with regards to Billy Jackson. One week before graduation Billy Jackson borrowed his uncle's Corvette and took it for a spin around the school while he was supposed to be in class. A school patrol unit was in the parking lot and warned Billy to take the car back to its parking place and to report to class. Instead of listening to the officer Billy spun the car around in a series of spins doing donuts for other students to see. He then took off at a high rate of speed out of the parking lot and exited the student parking lot doing over 70 miles per hour and straight into the path of a passing semi-trailer truck. The truck did not even have the time to press on its brakes and ran over the tiny corvette killing Billy instantly.

Word spread quickly about Billy's death. The news media converged on the school and many students cried on camera describing Billy as a good but

troubled boy. The teachers all talked about Billy's "potential". School counselors were made available for anyone needing grief counseling. Billy's parents, who had never made a single PTA meeting, spent every day in front of the school lamenting about how they missed their good little boy. They spoke endlessly about the great number of friends he had and how they had all approached them to tell them how much they were going to miss Billy.

The graduation ceremonies were held the day before Billy's funeral and he was given an honorary diploma by the school superintendent. This act was followed by a standing ovation, and everyone was reminded about his funeral which was to be held the following day.

A nice church service was held in a small chapel outside of McAllen and the place was packed to the max. The priest talked about forgiveness and a volunteer choir sang a few nice hymns to complement the service. Student after student went up to the church podium and talked about what a nice "friend" Billy had been. Some shared jokes about how Billy loved to "tease" others and how this may have caused them to misinterpret his playful intentions. One girl told a story of how his innocent behavior had almost gotten him suspended from school for calling a teacher a supposed racist name. The way the priest and so many others that did not really know Billy, spoke about him, made it seem as if Billy was the ideal student and classmate.

No one uttered a word about his constant fighting, and no one uttered a word about his stealing and bullying. If one didn't know any better it seemed as if Billy was a bona fide, honest to goodness saint who had come down from heaven to look over the entire group of the student body to make sure they all made it safely through graduation.

The service at the cemetery went smoothly and solemnly. His mother bawled loudly and cried over her little boy while everyone there maintained their silence. Before his casket was lowered to the ground many students passed by and placed a rose on top of it. His bawling mother was practically carried onto a nearby sedan, and his parents left the site almost immediately. Soon after, his casket was lowered to the ground, and the crowd began to disperse. I was about to leave as well when I saw Wesley Brown standing alone under a tree that was about twenty feet from the burial site. He seemed to be crying but I was not sure if he was or not.

I pretended to look at other grave markers and kept my eye on Wesley. After everyone else was gone, Wesley approached the grave site and stood there for a while. The plot had not been covered yet, and I wondered where the groundskeepers were. They usually covered a grave soon after the mourners left. I looked around and spotted three cemetery workers about seventy-five yards away wearing some orange vests and walking toward the

grave site. Each carried a shovel in his hand as they approached. Their tardiness allowed Wesley a private moment with Billy. Wesley stood at the foot of the grave and hesitated for a moment before angrily spitting into the open grave and forcefully throwing his walking cane into the hole and on top of the lowered casket. He turned awkwardly around and hobbled a hundred yards to his car. He turned it on and drove slowly out of the cemetery. I never told anyone about what Wesley did that day - but I understood why he did what he did.

— *the end* —