

Way We Were  
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Child Star Gone Bad

The news out of Hollywood these days is filled with high intensity drama. Some believe it is all fabricated to sell movie tickets or to encourage fans to buy the latest edition of a gossip magazine. Whether or not the lives of the rich and famous have been affected by the bright lights and paparazzi, one thing is certain; being a star certainly changes a person. And being a child star has been known to cause permanent damage. We all know the names Britney Spears, Amanda Bynes, Lindsey Lohan and, for some other generations, Danny Bonaduce.

In the fall of 1957, *Rusty and the Falcon* was filmed on the streets of Park City. The film starred a cute and quirky twelve-year-old named Rudy Lee (born Rudolph Ernest Wannberg). That same year, Rudy was cast as Steady Ware in the original Mickey Mouse Club series, alongside the ultra famous and beautiful Annette Funicello. It seemed as if Rudy's career was taking off and nothing could steer him in the wrong direction. At least that's what he thought.

By the mid-1960s, Rudy was back in Park City and causing trouble. The Park Record newspaper devoted a whole article on his return, commenting that "Rudy is back. But this time he is not roaming the hills of Summit County...Rudy is in jail."

In March of 1965, Rudy and his partner in crime Lee Oscar Stone were arrested by Park City police for breaking into a locked car at Treasure Mountains. After an apparent crime spree, breaking into multiple cars in the same parking lot, the two were finally caught. The young men were staying in a hotel in Heber City after making a spur of the moment decision (out of boredom) to leave L.A. and drive to Utah. When they were unable to find work and food was getting low, they decided that stealing and selling the items they had pilfered would help them keep food in their bellies.

Sheriff Ron Robinson told the Park Record that this was not Rudy's first run-in with the law. The California police had sent the Summit County sheriff quite the list of incidents, including forgery, bad checks, car theft, and other small misdemeanors. Both he and Lee Stone had been paroled from Soledad Prison in California just six months prior.

Both men were prosecuted in the state of Utah, even though they were violating their California parole. Per an article published in April 1965, they were charged with 1 to 10 years, and were being held in the Utah State Prison. They did not go quietly though. Before their sentences were issued, Rudy and Lee tried to make a break for it. According to the Park Record, "they succeeded in getting out of the inner cell but could not make it to the outside." Obviously the attempt was as well thought out as all of their criminal deeds!

The last word on Rudy was that "the attractive and charming youngster can be out in a year if he behaves himself. Stone was given the same sentence." Let's hope that Rudy learned his lesson and stayed on the straight and narrow!

*The Park City Historical Society & Museum is celebrating 30 years of preserving, protecting, and promoting Park City's history and heritage.*



Image #: 1958.187

Credit: Park City Historical Society & Museum, Kendall Webb Collection

Caption: Photo taken in front of 509 Main Street, the Sheriff's office, while filming Rudy's big break out film *Rusty and the Falcon* in 1957. Ironical just eight years later he'd end up right back in front of the building, but for far different reasons!