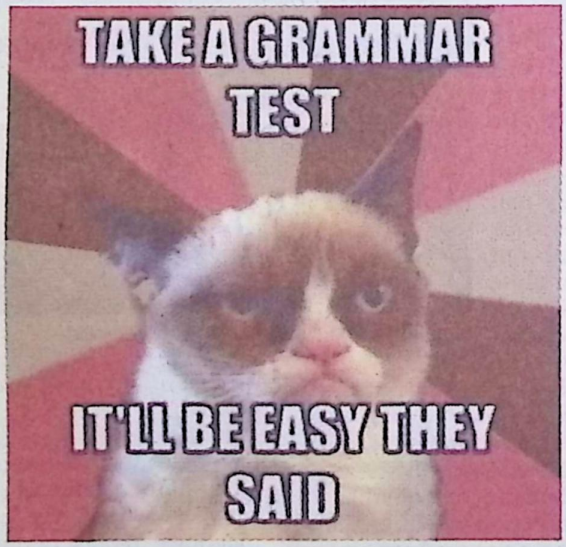


Stranger Than Fiction (By a Long Shot)

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They say that there is always something to be grateful for. Parents, teachers and students at a high school in San Mateo, California must certainly have thought so after a disturbed 17-year-old student's plan to wreak havoc was unexpectedly thwarted. Described variously as quiet, shy and reclusive, the boy was not perhaps the most obvious candidate to be found exploding pipe bombs on school premises. On the other hand, the frequency with which students perceived as social misfits are being identified as culprits in such incidents does lead one to question how teachers can be expected to differentiate between "rather shy" and "withdrawn to the point of psychosis".

A teacher who arrived on the scene after the first two bombs were detonated saw a boy wearing a tactical vest with a pipe bomb sticking out of his pocket. He immediately tackled the boy to the ground, holding him down until reinforcements arrived. Ironically, the teacher who had acted so swiftly to protect others had himself survived a troubled youth. Raised in a very strict Adventist family, Kennet Santana had rebelled against the strictures imposed on him. At the local Adventist school, he was both baptised and expelled in the eighth grade. It was the continuous support he received from a Korean friend that ultimately enabled him to turn his life around and begin excelling in high school.



Historical record provides examples too numerous to quote on the matter of robberies gone wrong (for the robber). And not necessarily stories of going out in a blaze of glory like Butch and Sundance, either.

Perhaps his own troubled history gave Santana an edge in recognising and acting swiftly to neutralise the danger he found himself facing. The speed of his reaction was critical, under the circumstances. As it turned out, the student hadmade contingency plans to kill those who survived the pipe bomb explosions. To that end, he was armed with eight additional pipe bombs, a sword and a chainsaw hidden in a violin case. Thankfully, and somewhat bizarrely, the sheer weight of all his weaponry made it easier to take him down.

Sometimes, the serendipitous nature of events is undeniable, leading to the creation of even stranger heroes