



Celebrating our 20 years in Business | **20 years of Stories**

The story I was never going to tell...

I never, ever thought I would be telling this story - not even E-V-E-R! Not even sitting back and relaxing with family and friends... and if you are my closest friends, you are going to wonder why I never told you this one. I've always felt or really known, I couldn't let this one slip out as I can count on one hand the people that know and that's why this story has been on my mind. If I'm really going to write about 20-years in business, well, this story has its place in the top 10.

Is it number one - I'll let all of you decide.

This story illustrates in neon lights how running your own business certainly has tricky spots where everything gets redirected and put on-the-line! I am breaking this story out just for all of you, but I won't be using any names - you'll soon understand why. I am taking a deep breath as I decide where to begin...

Our daughter attended a local preschool about 6 years ago. Payten had been attending this school for about a year when things changed when an entourage of vehicles joined the daily parade up the long lane to drop off. The routine was quickly apparent that it was always going to be a 3 vehicle ordeal with the protected party in the middle and two black SUV's - one leading and one in the rear - looking important and driving like it was important. We all learned to just scoot over if approaching the entourage speeding through the narrow lane.

The little boy was always dressed perfectly as either the mother or father walked with us into the cubby area to wish our children a great day before saying goodbye. I was always perplexed by the whole scene and didn't know quite what to do or say as men dressed in suits, wires up into their ears and dark sunglasses held the door open for us and their precious cargo.

Our daughter ended up in the cubby right next to this little boy and I never knew if I should say "Good Morning Governor" to just a normal person probably wanting 5 minutes of a normal life - so I said nothing and decided to just smile and let either parent dropping off to just be normal, like us. I really was glad they were there - remember that as I tell you the rest of the story - and there was nowhere safer than where I was sending my daughter because two highway patrolmen stayed with their son.

While attending the preschool together their son had a birthday and we were all invited to the party at the Governor's Mansion. It was so charming. We pulled up on a Saturday with white event tents in the lawn - I think to

block any outside pictures - and just beyond those tents, all kinds of Wal-Mart water toys were in the middle of the lawn. We were told to dress in casual clothes and as my family walked up the few steps onto the lawn, Gavin was probably 9 and kept looking up at the huge house and said, "Do you think the governor will come out!" We walked a few steps further and the governor was right at our feet. I said to Gavin, "Gavin this is the governor." Gavin shook his hand and acted like he couldn't believe he came out of the massive house, as he kept looking back up at like he should still be in there somehow! There were treats, little pools, water slides... It was perfect - it was a special day.

I am just not into local politics, but I sure remember where I was when I received a particular call from my husband, Scott as I was driving to Columbia for an appointment. At the end of our conversation he told me his last call had said we should watch the news tonight...something big is about to happen from the governor's office. I then added that the State of the State Address was tonight and that could possibly be what the news was referring to. Scott said he didn't think so because this nameless person told him not to tell anyone.

I thought nothing of it. You know the saying: Three may keep a secret if two of them are dead? Well, while I was on a call with my office assistant discussing a listing I briefly mentioned what Scott had said and asked her if any of the local news had posted anything. I knew she was right in front of a computer where she quickly looked at the local news and said she saw nothing new. No big deal to me - I didn't think much about it - ended our conversation and kept driving.

Now, you know when something big happens and everything slows down into slow motion and you can remember every single second... every-single-one...

...my day was about to be one to remember forever.

My phone rang through my car speaker and it was my office assistant and she was excited about something...her voice was just about ready to tell me what. I will use a quote here because the exact words are burned into my brain forever. She continued, "If you want to know anything, just ASK TWITTER!" I pulled - no abruptly jerked - my SUV to a skidding stop along the side of Highway 63. She now had my full attention as I was putting together what she had probably done... and oh yeah, it just got worse from there.

She proceeded to tell me - still very pleased with her investigative work - how she logged into her Twitter account and put this tweet: "My boss just heard some news is happening today with the Governor, does anyone know what's going on?"

Now, I was freaking out!

I think my next words were, "Oh my, oh my ***! You didn't - did you? Are you joking?" Now, she started panicking, but still not understanding why she should be panicking. She started saying over and over in between my words that she would take her tweet down...BUT...it was way too late.

The Twitter world had seen it.

The first response to her tweet was an unknown man telling her unfounded accusations (maybe I'll tell you the exact words at our 40th year in business, but I'm not going to now), then more tweets started coming with others wanting to know what we knew. I turned my car around while she was disabling her Twitter account. I was just stunned, shell-shocked, shaking... hoping that was it. But...it wasn't.

Before I could get back to the office Scott called... and asked me who I had told. Scott had just received a call from the original person he spoke to just 30 minutes ago and they had already seen a screenshot of our office assistant's tweet. The person showing him had Googled her and knew she worked for McMichael Realty and now knew who her bosses were. It was now officially traced back to our office and they had seen it. Apparently, just so you know, the governor's office and others have alerts when the governor's name is used. They were frantic to get the leak stopped and had screenshots of the Tweet AND THE RESPONSES.

Take a deep breath here because I had to when just writing this part.

I couldn't tell anyone, I couldn't call anyone and all I was thinking was how long would it take for a news outlet to call OR be at our office doors to ask what we knew...which was NOTHING! We decided to turn all the lights off and lock the office doors - we were not going to answer that door if the news did come our way. I then called our website designer and told him to shut our website and all of our social media down - NOW! He's a very calm, passive individual and he did finally say something like, "There must be something you can't tell me?" I thought, oh boy is there!

I just needed our website and all of our social media down so no one could comment, match the name of our employee with the tweet and find out who her bosses were. We/she needed to disappear from everywhere until we even knew what was going on - which I still had NO IDEA. I did know this... if the alerts went up that quickly and Scott had already received a call back from this individual asking who he had told - we had trouble - and it MUST be big.

That night, Scott and I flipped from the local channel to Columbia's local channels and then back to our phones for anything online - NOTHING! Five O'Clock News - NOTHING!

Six O'Clock News - NOTHING!

The State of the State came on and we could see the governor talking...he seemed happy - NOTHING!

But then something interesting was said or maybe something noticed; the governor went straight back to the governor's mansion and did not shake hands or stay to visit. What was the hurry?

...Then it all broke loose...

The story was first released from a St. Louis media source in which there were allegations against the governor. So now it was out there. Our office assistant was texting us...we were texting her...we couldn't tell anyone the day we had! I just thought, "They no longer care about our little Tweet," but we kept everything down - just in case.

To just be young! To just be young with no consequences or responsibilities! Our office assistant really didn't fully know what she had done... There is a generational gap where it is just not a big deal to put something out into the world and have it answered back - good or bad. But my generation/I had to face the consequences.

We stayed up sitting in our bed glued to our phones where pre-written statements from the governor and then his wife were being released by their press staff. The statements were carefully crafted with a deep undertone of love for each other and their family. We felt very sad for their family that night.

The next days were more statements and their two kids were taken out of this area to be around family. Now it was national news. It was a mess, a newsstorm in which no family would ever want to be in.

Somewhere among those days, another statement was made by the governor's wife, and that one I remember. I felt that one was directed right at little old me that didn't even care to have a part in this whole mess...and didn't even make the Tweet! These comments, her comments, were written not by a group of people, but by her. The comments were painful to read as she, the best I remember, talked about the people who acted nice to them but spread this upon her family...it went on. Whatever it said, I felt very bad for all of them and felt her personal pain as a wife and mother. There was nothing I could do, it's not like I could call her up and tell her how it all happened and that I didn't even care...it was an accident! I just had to feel her pain.

I can laugh about how it all happened now, certainly not about the family that was destroyed. I always look at things and try to learn something. I did learn about a difference in generations and what they find acceptable to Tweet. Maybe we should all just realize that every single action we take, each and every day - big or small - has consequences. Sometimes we can see the full impact like in this story, but most of the time we can't. Maybe we all should be more responsible for what we put out into the world.

Oh... and don't ask the Twitter world a question if you're not prepared to receive the full answer.