

## **NC Burglar Shares Tips on How He Preyed on Homes**

Charlotte's most prolific burglar details what he looked for in residential security weaknesses

Apr. 23--If you lived in a middle- or upper-class neighborhood in Charlotte in the 1990s, you may have seen Anthony Ferguson walking down your street. Chances are he carried a rake and had gardening gloves in his back pocket.

But Ferguson was no landscaper.

He was a burglar, the most prolific in city history.

Ferguson confessed to breaking into more than 600 Charlotte homes from the mid-1980s until he was caught in 1999, police said. He's now serving a 12-year sentence at a federal prison in Kentucky.

But before he was locked up, police did something to ensure that his record won't be broken.

As part of a plea bargain, they spent days driving him around and interviewing him about his methods. They have turned the highlights into a video that will air on the Government Channel this week.

Ferguson, 43, did not return calls last week. If his good behavior continues, a spokeswoman said, he's scheduled to get out of prison in 2010.

His observations to police on more than five hours of tape are frank, frightening and sometimes counterintuitive. But they offer a glimpse into the mind of a prolific burglar whose stories give new advice on the best ways to protect your home.

### **Pick the right neighborhood**

Ferguson was 10 when he broke into his first Charlotte home. Early on, he took TVs, VCRs and other electronics. But he soon realized that jewelry was the best target, since it fit in his pockets and could be melted down. Over the next 25 years, what started as a hobby turned into a profession that he says netted him between \$3 million and \$5 million.

"The more I broke into houses, the more I had to do it," he says

on the video. "It's like potato chips. You can't eat just one. That's how I survived. That's how I ate. That's how I got money to have a place to sleep."

He said he always started with a high-income neighborhood such as Foxcroft or Park Crossing, and he hit during the day.

Mornings between 8 and 11 were best, but early afternoon could work too. He avoided lunchtime and evenings because people were likely to be home, and he especially liked rainy days.

"When it rains, people tend to be in a hurry and they really get careless," he said. "They forget to lock their door or lock their windows."

Because jewelry was his specialty and it's easy to carry, Ferguson always entered the neighborhood by foot -- never by car.

Often, he wore disguises.

"If you see me and two other black guys, you're going to automatically call police because we look suspicious," Ferguson said. "But if I got a rake thrown over my shoulder and plastic bags hanging out of my back pocket and a pair of gloves hanging out of my back pocket, you think I'm somebody's yard man."

Ferguson picked a target, then always knocked to make sure the house was empty.

If someone answered, he would ask for Mr. Smith or Mrs. Won or some other made-up name. Or he'd offer to do some yard work. Several times, residents took him up on the offer, he said, and he got stuck raking or cleaning gutters all day.

When that happened, he said, "I usually went back and broke in later."

### **Entry is often easy**

If no one answered the door, Ferguson hid behind bushes, shrubs, a fence or whatever cover was available.

Then he would wait at least 15 minutes, to make sure neighbors hadn't called police.

He liked to break in through windows, but always tried doors first.

"You'd be surprised how many doors I turn the handle and the door comes open and I walk right in," he said. "And nine times out of 10, people leave their windows unlocked."

A locked house? Not a problem -- though he never carried burglary tools.

"You don't have to, because the homeowner is going to leave something for you to do it with," he said. "People leave their garage doors open, they leave tool boxes sitting on back porches, they leave stuff just laying around for you to use on their houses."

### **Alarms are no deterrent**

For Ferguson at least, alarm systems weren't a deterrent. In fact, he specifically looked for homes that had them. For one thing, he said, they were turned off more than half the time. He usually could check out the system because of what he describes as a chronic security company mistake: "They put the alarm box where I can look in the window and see it."

Another mistake, according to Ferguson: Most two-story homes have no alarms on the second floor -- where many master bedrooms and most jewelry boxes can be found.

"If you don't have an alarm on a second-floor window," Ferguson said, "and there's a tree or ladder or anything, I'll crawl up and go through the second-floor window and never, ever set the alarm off because I don't even have to go downstairs."

When all else failed, he could avoid the system by taking apart a window rather than opening it. Once inside, he was careful to avoid motion detectors.

"If I do go in your house and you got an alarm system, I never step in a hallway and I never step in a doorway and I check for sensors," he said. "To get from room to room, I kick holes in the Sheetrock."

If the alarm went off, however, Ferguson always fled. Often, he said, the police would pass him walking down the street, his pockets stuffed with jewelry, as they sped to the home.

"They would just ride right by. I would jump on the city bus and go back across town."

## **One Burglar's Wish List**

Here's what burglar Anthony Ferguson looked for:

A well-maintained home and yard. "If someone keeps their yard lookin' really nice, that lets me know that person right there has the quality house I'm looking for." Ferguson said he also looked at such things as fresh paint and nice porch furniture.

Cover. It could be bushes, shrubs, trees or a tall wooden fence close to the house where he could hide. "The houses that are more in the open, that don't have cover, are the ones that don't get hit."

Toys and flowers. Because he was a jewelry thief, Ferguson looked for signs that a woman lived in the house.

Open or broken windows. "And it doesn't have to be a bottom-story window. It could be a second-floor window, and people leave a lot of second-floor windows open."

An alarm system. "I basically don't hit houses that ain't got alarms. The houses that got the alarms, you know, 'Hey, there's something there.' " (Police say most other burglars are deterred by alarm systems.)

## **Burglar Turnoffs**

Here's what made Ferguson think twice: Nosy neighbors. "If I see a neighbor looking out the window, nine times out of 10, I'm going to leave."

Television or radio noise. "A lot of houses have been lucky I didn't go into them because I hear the TV or I hear music and it makes me think someone is there."

Covered windows. "If the blinds are closed, it gives the impression that someone is there. That puts a little fear in you."

Dogs. Ferguson has burglarized homes with dogs, but said they make it more difficult. "When a dog barks, people start looking out their windows to see why the dog is barking."

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