

NOTES

What was your very first job? Babysitting? Mowing lawns? In his humorous, yet heartwarming short story, Jake Barton introduces us to a young man, who unexpectedly finds himself carrying on the legacy of his father. This selection would be best performed by a male and be entered in Prose Interpretation; however, because this story is written in first-person, a performer might choose to enter this selection in Humorous Interpretation. There are several emotional levels found within this selection. There is, of course, the humor involved in donning a costume to lure customers into a place of business, yet there is also a degree of warmth, as the young man recounts the story of how his mother and father met. Play that warmth, as it will add another level of depth and sophistication to the overall performance. The drama mask icons are simply visible to show the performer when to turn the pages in his manuscript.

My dad was a rat. That's what Mom says. She said the very first time she saw him, she *knew* he was a rat. He even admitted it. He was standing out in front of *Jack's Pest Control*. Mom and her sister, my Aunt Jenny, were arguing about what type of rodent the man dressed up in a grayish-brown, fur suit was supposed to be. Aunt Jenny thought my dad was a possum, but Mom insisted he was a rat. The only way to settle the argument was to walk right up to the furry creature and ask. Mom strolled over to Dad and said, "Excuse me, but are you a rat?" My dad, not understanding, said, "No. I've never told on anyone." Mom laughed and said, "No, I mean the costume. Are you a rat?" According to Mom, Dad laughed, held his little paws out away from his body, looked down at the matted, furry, monstrosity of a costume he was wearing, looked back up at Mom and said, "Not many guys would be brave enough to admit it but yes—I'm a rat." Mom then turned around and yelled to Aunt Jenny, who was standing beside the car with Grandpa, "I was right. He's a rat!" Then Dad decided to ask Mom out on a date. He said, "Well, you know, we rats really like to eat, so would you like to go get a *cheeseburger* with me on Friday night?" Overlooking the corniness of the invitation, Mom said she just knew this man, my Dad, was a great guy. There she stood, staring into his blue eyes shining visibly through the two round holes cut out above his broom-like whiskers. She told me they were the bluest eyes she had ever seen. Mom (never one to be mousey) told Dad, "Friday would be fine. Give me a call." Then she gave Dad her phone number, walked back over to the car, and even though she had never actually *seen* him, told Grandpa and Aunt Jenny, "Friday night—I'm going out with a blue-eyed rat!"

Confessions of a Teenage Rat

By Jake Barton



Two hundred and sixteen cheeseburgers later, Dad, the rat in furry armor, walked out of Saint Matthew’s Wedding Cathedral hand-in-hand with his new bride, my mom, as throngs of wedding guests threw *shredded cheese* at the happy couple.



My parent’s wedding reception was held at what Grandpa called a little *hole-in-the-wall* banquet room down at the local VFW Hall. According to Mom, Aunt Jenny was in charge of all of the decorations and, inspired by how Mom and Dad met, went all out on the rodent-themed gala. Everyone’s place cards were held up by little mouse traps. Everyone thought it was hysterical—that is, until Grandpa got his finger caught in one. He yelled, “I don’t give a rat’s butt whose idea this was—just get me out of this thing!” After the episode with Grandpa, things finally settled down, and everyone spent the rest of the evening snacking from assorted cheese trays and dancing to songs by members of The Rat Pack.



Three years later, Tom and Ellen McGuire were blessed with the arrival of a little bundle of joy, me, that they lovingly named Jerry. That’s right. They named me Jerry. Mom denies, however, that my name had anything to do with how they met, Dad’s name being Tom, or their love of classic cartoons like *Tom and Jerry*. Yeah, right.



You might be wondering why I’m telling you all of this. Well, I’ve filled out job applications at over a dozen places in town, and I finally got hired. This new pizza parlor is opening, and they hired over two dozen teenagers from the local high school. The problem is that they’ve already filled the positions for waiters and cooks, and the only position left requires a very special uniform. Okay, so it’s not really a uniform. It’s a costume. And I know what you’re thinking—*like father like son*—but you’d be wrong. No one is going to confuse me for a possum! I’m a rat. The manager said my costume is unquestionably, without-a-doubt, no ifs-and-or-buts an overweight rat! I keep telling myself it really won’t be that bad. When I told my folks, Dad said that it’s nice to know I’ll be carrying on the family tradition. Mom just laughed and said, “CongRATs!”



I’ve never understood why a pizza parlor (or any food establishment for that matter) would choose a “rat” to be their advertising marketing tool. But what do I know? Maybe research shows that people associate