Gavin Gardiner – posted on Facebook, February 12, 2018

When I was 13 I was picked up by the RCMP after trespassing and stealing from a stranger's farm just outside of Swift Current, Saskatchewan. Some friends and I broke locks and windows to rifle through outbuildings looking for whatever was valuable to teenage shitheads.

Presumably tipped off, the RCMP were waiting down the road to catch us red handed and I spent the evening in jail.

Luckily, the Crown was trying out a new precharge diversion program in Swift Current and through a circle process with the couple who owned the farm, I was able to avoid legal consequences with a heartfelt apology and a commitment to volunteer hours.

I spent more than a few weekends that summer pulling weeds on that same farm as an agreed term of my restitution.

After my weeding duties were done one night I asked one of the couple's daughters, who was more or less my age, who I should be friends with if I wanted to start things off right when I began high school in a few months.

The person she mentioned became my best friend throughout high school and beyond. When I went to the University of Saskatchewan, I met most of my friends in the dorms where my high school best friend lived. Largely, through the friends I met in the dorms, I was elected president of U of S Students' Union. Tangentially, the Students Union led me to the Yukon where I began working for the Carcross/Tagish First Nation alongside Mark Wedge and Barry Stuart who together literally wrote the book on restorative justice. It was largely their mentorship that led me back to school, this time for a law degree. I'm now a practicing Yukon lawyer working with many of the communities that have helped me along the way.

I recognize I'm a white dude oozing with privilege (as this whole story exemplifies). But I can nonetheless trace every one of my life's current blessings, aside from my family, to the forgiveness of those strangers when I was 13. There is no path to where I am today that doesn't involve the couple I was caught stealing from.

There is a lot to say this week (as there was days and decades previously) about structural racism, peremptory jury challenges, culpable homicide, standards of proof and the desperate need for a law reform commission in this country. And I'll have those conversations (offline) with anyone who will listen, especially those who respectfully disagree. But in the meantime, I think its only right to reveal this deeply personal story, one most of my closest friends don't even know, in order to convey my most fervent belief about this entire case:

When a stranger comes onto your property to destroy and steal your possessions, force yourself to meet them with forgiveness not a loaded gun.