

Animal' sent to prison for stealing library book turns over a new leaf

By

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Eric Borsuk and three of his friends stole a library book, which led to a violent crime, as depicted in the movie "American Animals." Now, Borsuk is living in Brooklyn and has written his own book on the experience. Everett Collection / Everett Col

When he was 19 in 2004, Eric Borsuk and three of his friends pulled off a bizarre heist: They stole a rare original copy of Darwin's "On the Origin of Species" from a college library in Kentucky and assaulted an elderly female librarian in the process.

As a result, Borsuk's life went from regular college kid to federal prison and then to Hollywood, with the 2018 release of the critically acclaimed film "American Animals,"

based on their crime. Now, his memoir, also called "[American Animals](#)" (Turner Publishing), is out — further detailing his exploits.

Borsuk, grew up in Lexington, Ky., with a mechanical-engineer father, kindergarten-teacher mother and two siblings. But as a freshman at the University of Kentucky, he began feeling increasingly depressed.

When his best friend Warren Lipka approached Borsuk and two other pals with a plan to rob the rare books vault at nearby Transylvania University, this seemed like an answer to Borsuk's "existential crisis."

After bungled attempts, which included disguising themselves as elderly gentlemen, on the day of the heist Borsuk was supposed to be a lookout. Instead, Lipka called Borsuk into the books vault, where he found the librarian tied up. Borsuk describes this as a horrifying moment, where he felt his whole life change, "like a train switching tracks."

Even so, two days later, the teens went on a joyride to New York City, where they dressed as businessmen and attempted to sell the tome to Christie's auction house.



Based on a book of real life events, "American Animals" depicts Eric Borsuk and three friends stealing a rare original copy of Darwin's "On the Origin of Species" only to try to sell it to Christie's auction house. Everett Collection / Everett Col

Eventually caught in an FBI raid after e-mail addresses linked them to the crime, Borsuk and his friends were all sentenced equally on charges that included theft of cultural artifacts and transportation of stolen property.

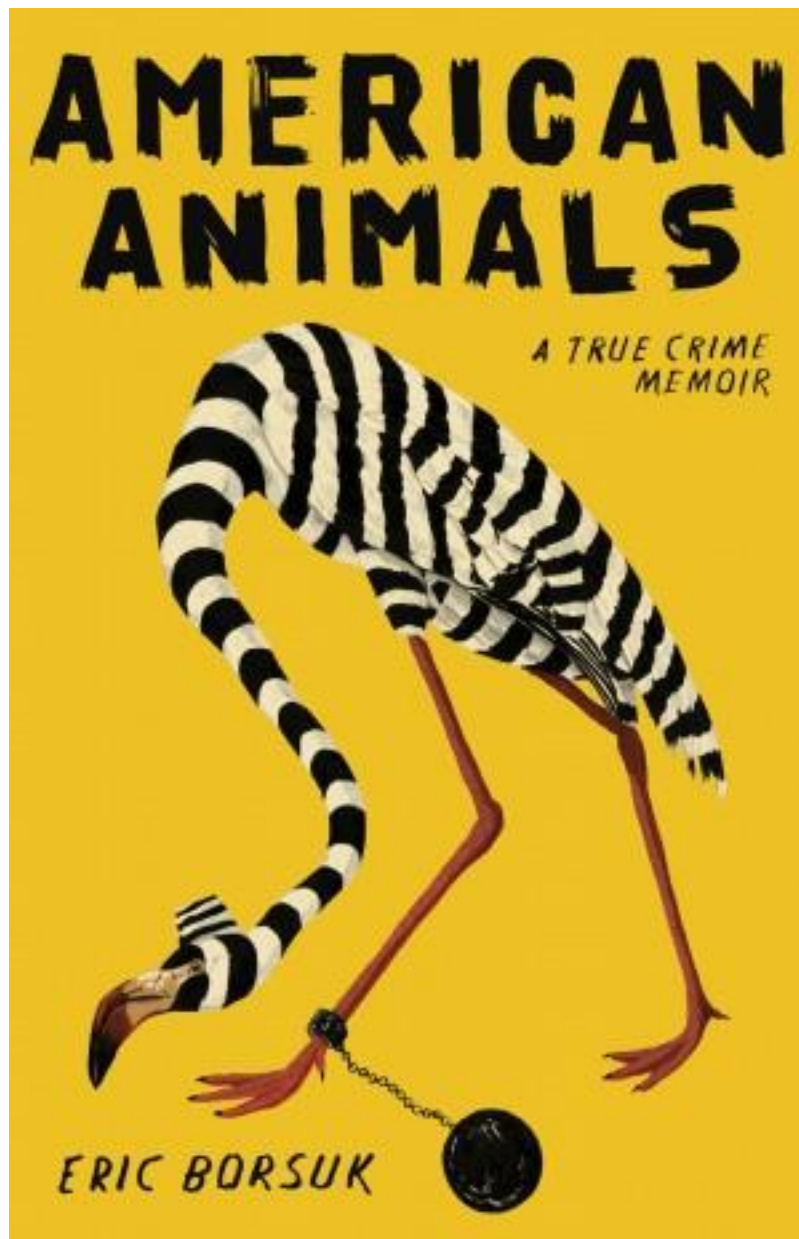
“We pled guilty,” Borsuk told The Post.

“I had a great judge, she was so fair and impartial,” he continued. “The sentencing took a year, so we got to say good bye to family and friends. The prosecution was tough and wanted 15 years for us. The judge said that ‘wouldn’t serve your lives any justice.’ She wanted us to be able to get back on track.”

Each of them was sentenced to seven years, and Borsuk and Lipka were initially placed in the same prison.

“The first two years, we had been doing really good setting up classes almost like a college curriculum,” Borsuk said. “Then we did an interview with Vanity Fair and it completely set off the prosecutor. He had us all thrown in solitary confinement. After that, I had to dive deep into writing. I split my days into reading, writing and exercising.

“Prison showed me another side of humanity,” Borsuk continued. “There were a lot of immigrants detained. The more I talked to them about their crimes, families and their homes, everyone shared this same story that they were searching for something in life. They were often decent people who had gotten themselves into bad situations. It really humbled me.”



Released in 2012 after serving six years in prison and one year in a halfway house, Borsuk remains humble, despite his brush with the limelight. (He appears in the movie “American Animals,” which premiered at Sundance and starred X-Men actor Evan Peters as Lipka.)

“When I got out, I did probation, then I traveled a lot. I lived in Kentucky, Charlotte, Philly, San Francisco, LA and now New York. It’s been difficult. I’ve been on the streets,” Borsuk said.

Though he remains in touch with his college friends and says his family is “loving and accepting,” he admits he doesn’t see anyone from his past life at the moment.

Borsuk, now 35, is currently living in Brooklyn, where he serves on the board of directors of Die Jim Crow, the first nonprofit record label in the United States for currently and formerly incarcerated musicians. He has also written for The Marshall Project and is working on his next book, a prison memoir.

“I’ve given myself a right to live and see the opportunity in hardship,” he said. “I just want to experience life as much as possible, as long as I stay true to myself and don’t compromise my morals again.”