

village view

by Andrea Leonard

It becomes difficult not to grow angry, not to lose faith in the goodness of humanity, not to wonder what our society has become. It becomes more difficult to restrain impulses to take matters into our own hands, to take vengeance, to mete out justice on an eye-for-an-eye basis.

When those who commit crimes go unpunished, when the victims of crimes are uncompensated and unsatisfied, justice is ill-served.

Dateline Marstons Mills: A garden, lovingly prepared, carefully planted, eagerly nurtured, is vandalized. The waste of food and labor, the heartless and heedless rampage thru vegetables and flowers, steals from us all. It is not alone the loss to those whose garden was ruined. All of us are robbed of security, even of rationality.

Although we know punishing the responsible parties won't restore the garden, mend broken plants, nor restore what is wasted, we cannot but believe swift and certain punishment might prevent repetition.

Appropriate punishment? (First, of course, the persons must be identified.) Jail? Too good. How about short rations? A bread and water diet within sight of the ravished garden?

Ah, ah! Cruel and unusual treatment, cry the public defenders. Destroying another's garden is cruel and unusual behavior; how better to teach the value of food produced by man's labor in the good earth?

Keep a vicious dog? Ah, ah, is the cry. Dogs must be leashed and/or muzzled. Mustn't let the dogs roam out of control.

Perhaps the farmer should patrol his garden with a loaded shotgun. Ah, ah, comes the cry. Should someone be harmed on your property, you're liable. It's not your duty to defend yourself or your homestead; that's the function of law enforcement officers.

Dateline Hyannis: While driving to work in broad daylight a teenage girl is assaulted, raped, left with a brain concussion. Her screams are reported to the police who come with police dog, Shep. He tracks the attacker; after the man's capture and arraignment, bail is set. BAIL.

Then we learn of every hundred accused rapists only six are ever prosecuted. Further, it's proposed a woman's "past sexual activity" be considered when prosecuting a rapist. In all good conscience, what has that to do with being a victim of heinous crime?

Must a working girl be accompanied by a protector while traveling to and from her job?

Appropriate punishment? This is a family newspaper.

Dateline Falmouth: While asleep in her own bed a girl wakes to find a man has entered her room through the window in pre-dawn hours. He attempts to force her to swallow pills. Her screams frighten him off and he departs the way he came. Left behind are scattered pills on the floor and a 12-inch knife. An apparent accomplice drives the get-away car.

Where are law-enforcement officers? They are few compared to the many of us. They can't be everywhere at once. They do all they can. And when they apprehend an alleged criminal and appear in court to testify the accused is released "in his own recognizance" until the case can be marked up for trial. Being a policeman can be deeply discouraging.

Dateline Osterville: Posted signs indicate parking is limited to ten minutes at the post office. The village is patrolled by an officer on foot. He is expected to enforce the laws and keep the peace in the village, a village where everyone but him has a vehicle.

He is approached by a lady who has just left her big car at the post office and has informed him she enjoys "importance and standing". She supplies her name and tells him she expects special attention and consideration. The officer is polite and pleasant. When she returns to her car after more than ten minutes have elapsed she is outraged to find a parking

Should we have meters? Should we ban all parking in our village? Are we to have rules for everyone, or are we to have rules that most must obey but that differ for a favored few?

Dateline West Barnstable: Door-to-door magazine salesperson, his pitch, rejected, threatens physical harm to a householder... Requests he leave the premises meet with outright refusal.

Can we do anything about it? Licenses are available and obtained; not until complaints are received can rights be revoked. Should all canvassing be barred in Barnstable? Should the innocent be punished as well as the few who are guilty?

Dateline Osterville: Patrons of a restaurant are approached by a young person asking for donations to the Unification Church; in return a contriutor is offered a nosegay of plastic flowers? A church? Good Cause. Or is it? This is the church of the man who calls himself Moon and whose followers appear to be coerced to accept his teachings.

What's to be done?

Dateline Washington: Tip O'Neill's buddy gets bumped from his well-paying job after locking horns with Jimmy Carter's Georgian friend. Tip and Jimmy are suddenly enemies. To heal the breach, Jimmy creates for Tip's pal a new, even better-paying job. There goes another \$50,000 a year from the taxpayer's pockets. But now Tip and Jimmy can have breakfast together.

Dateline Provincetown: Mystery ship carried marijuana.

Dateline Sandwich: Tons of marijuana found aboard fishing boat.

And so it goes. From vandalism to rape, from attack to pay-off to drug trafficking, from threat and trespass to influence and power. Society seems riddled with disease and corruption.

Society's fabric is rent and torn from West Barnstable to Washington; such incidents are all too commonplace. After the first shock of realizing these things happened right here at home on Cape Cod, we shrug, "It wasn't anyone I know, so it need not concern me."

But next time, friend, it could be you.

What does it matter that the man whose garden was destroyed is not your blood brother, your neighbor, your acquaintance? That man has no enemy. The action wasn't a personal vendetta; rather, a blind senseless thing. Your garden could be next.

The terrified young women are unknown to me and you, as individuals, but either might have been our sister, daughter, friend. Or one or the other of us.

The name of the person seeking special privilege is an unfamiliar one to me. Her ire was misplaced. And the householder who asked the magazine seller to depart is a stranger, but his case is not unique, nor will he be the last to have the experience.

We all ought to care. We all must care. If we all don't care, no one will care when we, in turn, are the victims.

Yes, it's difficult not to be angry. It's time we were angry. If we're angry enough, we'll unite to effect changes to reverse the trends now threatening to destroy all we hold dear.