

EDITORIAL

August 23, 1984 VILLAGE ADVERTISER

Even if it kills them

Dead on arrival. Dead at the scene. Emergency surgery. Intensive care. Paralysis. Brain damage.

Are these the futures we envision for our children? Are these what we program them and ourselves to face? Are we, are they, is any one of us, prepared to deal with life on these terms?

Hard questions, but ones we need to ask because almost every day during the summer months, somewhere in Barnstable County, some young person is reported dead or seriously injured in a late-night alcohol-related automobile accident.

None of us knows when the fickle finger of fate will point at one of our own.

What are we doing about it? As a report comes over the radio, we pause to hear the name of the victim. If it is one we know, our hearts ache in sympathy for the family; if the name belongs to strangers, we close our minds to the pain, the loss, because none of us has enough stored-up emotion to spread among all who suffer. Fleeting moments of thought for grieving survivors are diverted by the next item of devastating news. We all become inured. Our feelings grow calloused.

Then we hear about the "sting" operation in Truro where a 19-year-old policeman purchases beer at four different liquor stores without once being asked for his ID. Store operators howl "foul play," as though a contest were under way with them and the public on one side, and officers of the law on the other. And as though the police weren't playing by the rules.

Booze is not a game. Nor are auto accidents and hospitals and funerals games. And booze is particularly unsporting when teenagers are involved. Booze kills and maims them, their passengers, and those in other cars. And we, as adults,

as society, shirk responsibility to stop the mayhem. We avoid confronting the situation honestly. If we can blot it from our conscious thoughts, we need not deal with the complexities of drunk driving on the part of any age group. We are, of course, no better prepared to deal with drunk driving by adults than by teenagers.

Not until it hits home must the enormity of the pain be faced. When it hits home, it hits hard. Hard.

Why do we shrink from keeping alcohol out of the hands of teenagers? Do we give them loaded guns and allow them to use one another (and us) for target practice? Is it because we adults misuse alcohol, too, and are unwilling to admit that even to ourselves? Are we unable to take a firm stand, even to save lives, because we know, deep down, we are failing to set the example we wish our children to follow?

Do we license our youth to defy the law, to drink alcoholic beverages while under legal age, to drink and drive cars and motorcycles, to destroy themselves and other people? Do we license our young people because we adults will not or cannot quit boozing ourselves?

Nobody wants to confess that, of course. Nobody. So we don't. Instead we give lip service to laws that adults and teenagers alike set out to prove are unenforceable. Adults drink legally, then drive their cars; teenagers use alcohol illegally, then drive their cars. When law officers expose illegal sales of alcoholic beverages to teenagers, our sympathies swing to the side of the seller because we view him as having been duped by the police, just as he may be duped by false IDs in the hands of youngsters trying to buy booze. And because we drink and drive, we see the police as adversaries, at times. And in identical circumstances, we identify with others who drink and drive. Even kids.

Even if it kills them.