

village view

by Andrea Leonard

(NOTE: As a change of pace for all us, I've asked my brother Roger Leonard to be guest columnist this week. I hope you enjoy it. Andrea Leonard.)

It's my mail box, you see, that "they" yank out of the ground. Our house is set well-back from the road. There are trees and bushes between our front bedroom windows and the mail box. In a way I'm glad I can't see the vandals at work.

Any yet, if I happen to hear from late night, I do have some options. One, I could call the police. Don't laugh.

Two, I could sneak out the back door, through the woods and lay it on 'em with my fifty-shot pump-action B-B gun.

Three, I could spray the whole mess of them with charges of ole-fashioned rock salt from my 16-gauge automatic shot gun.

Four, I could grab my 44 Magnum Ruger rifle from bedside. This is rather too much; the bullet from this rifle enters the target traveling at a speed of about a half-mile per second. That's why option four is too much, at least at this point in consideration of options.

"Hey, man," somebody might say, "it's only a mail box."

"Yeah," I'd answer, "but it's my mail box."

Three times now they've left it lying there beside the road. Last time, they stamped on the box itself. Bent the hell out of it.

What to do? Well, sweating in the summer sun, I dig into the rock-bound gravel pit I call my yard. I manage to make the hole wider and deeper as I remove rocks and stones and more rocks and stones.

My two young sons watch as I dig deeper into this ground that has served as a base for the ravaged receptacle for our bills and letters.

As I dig, I gasp. I'm on my knees and I look up at my sons. I see a pair of serious brown eyes and a pair of laughing blue. Blue Eyes thinks it's funny when he catches me working hard. Brown Eyes worries about his mother becoming a widow.

"The hole is big enough now," says Brown Eyes. "Why don't you put a cross-bar through that hole in the bottom of the post and then pack those rocks down the hole around it before you fill it in?"

I look at them, both young and strong, and I remember.

I remember a night about thirty-four years ago at the corner of Main Street and Blossom Avenue in the village of Osterville. Hallowe'en. I was fourteen years old.

The sign on top of the post was quite small; maybe four inches high by eighteen inches long, maybe three-quarters of an inch thick. The wood post the sign had been mounted on was, we were to discover, something else.

This post was a twelve foot length of white oak measuring about six-by-six inches at its skinniest. Someone had decided this post should and would remain at that location for a long time.

Those who planted it dug a hole five feet deep, two-and-a-half feet wide. They bored two perpendicular holes through the bottom of the twelve foot length of oak and then they inserted two iron pipes through those holes.

Into the hole they had dug they poured concrete until it was about one foot below grade. It was then that they plunged the length of oak with the pipes in it into the wet concrete. They filled the rest of the hole with sand and whatever else was available.

It had stood there for a while by the time we came along.

How many were we? I don't remember. Maybe we were seven, eight, maybe a dozen.

How did we arrive at the corner of Main Street and Blossom Avenue that night? 'Cause we were kids, wandering around on Hallowe'en, that's how.

Once there, once together, we were organized and we decided it was important we take that sign down in one piece. For some reason "in one piece" was important; I don't remember why.

At any rate, as we struggled with it and as it became more difficult to extricate it from the ground, it became equally important to each of us: the damned thing must be pulled up.

As we heaved and hauled, more and more children came along, dropped their Jack O'Lanterns, and helped.

After about an hour we "got" that sign. It was lying there on the ground at the corner, some two-hundred-fifty to three-hundred pounds of sign. The original plan (if we really had one) was to move it to another location to confuse adults; however, the sign, post, and base was so heavy and we were so exhausted, we left it there.

If you tipped your head sideways, you could read it. It said, "Blossom Ave."

Those memories wash over me as I look up at my sons.

I've got a hole in the ground and a post with a mail box on top of it to put in the hole.

"We'll bury it deep," I tell them, "but let's fill the hole with screened sand instead of rocks so that the next time we have to bury it, the digging will be easier."

They brought the sand in the wheelbarrow, screened it, and helped me wash it into the hole around the post. We tamped it down good.

So far the battered old box is still there.