

Crime, society and answers: continuing enigma

Chester Smolski

It was 6:30 on a Sunday morning — a time and day when only joggers and insomniacs, like myself, are out on city streets — but, I discovered, it is also a time for criminals.

He appeared from behind a house, about 25 yards in front of me, walking at a fast pace away from me. I did not pay too much attention, because he was dressed in a jogging suit and I assumed he was returning to his neighborhood.

Looking closer, I noticed that he was carrying something. Oh, it's a car battery, I thought. Was he stealing it? I shouted at him. He did not turn around, but speeded his walk. I shouted at him again, in a louder voice. He started to run across the street and into a driveway. I ran after him, shouting along the way. I quickly found out that he could run faster with a car battery in hand than I could without one. I lost him as he dodged between some houses.

I circled the block, still looking. Realizing that I was no match for

him should I see him again, I picked up some rocks. I used to be quite accurate with a baseball, so maybe I would be lucky and stop him this way.

After walking around the block and cooling off, I became a little more rational and decided to seek out a policeman. I stood for a few minutes on the chance that a cruiser might come by. None did. I kept on walking, picked up the newspaper, stopped for a cup of coffee and returned home.

I knew it was too late to catch the culprit, but I thought the police should know about it, anyway.

When the police officer pulled up to the house after my call, I offered to ride with him around the neighborhood to look for the person and to explain what had happened. I described the alleged criminal.

The officer said that this pattern of criminal activity, which uses the guise of joggers, has been taking place over the past several months. Apparently no one suspects some early-morning runner of being a thief. Undoubtedly, that morning's experience made me realize that crime is a 24-hour phenomenon.

He also asked me why I ran after the person, for, too often, he said,

people look the other way and try to avoid "getting involved." I told him that it made me angry. My house has been broken into three times, my neighbors have been robbed, and even though I did not know the person whose battery was stolen, he or she is another victim with whom I can identify. I know the feeling of having your privacy invaded, the frustration of seemingly being able to do little about it, the time wasted having to deal with the problems and the financial loss. To some people, a \$50-battery is a large expense.

The police officer thanked me for my information and help, and told me of his frustrations at not being able to catch criminals, and, when he did, of the difficulty of getting them prosecuted. Once prosecuted and confined, they are almost immediately back on the street. Crime has always been a problem in cities, from the time of their origins some 5,500 years ago to the present, but today's criminal is far more sophisticated and uses the system to his advantage.

It is ironic that only the day before, when visiting friends on Cape Cod at their home in a quiet

bucolic setting, we were talking about crime in the city. Yes, I told my friend, it is true that crime is the major concern of city dwellers, but it is not endemic to the city. Increasing crime rates in suburbs and the country simply substantiate that crime is a societal problem and not unique to a certain type of settlement, and the sooner all of us realize that it is not something from which we can run, the sooner all of us can work together to resolve the problem.

That lone jogger-robber succeeded in his mission, and another crime statistic will be recorded, once the victim discovers his loss and reports it to the police, who will have another site to plot on their map to show the location of the crime. I will have the memory of seeing a person commit a crime and the rage I felt toward him. As a Providence resident, I feel victimized, because this act reflects on the quality of life and the image of this city, both of which need to be enhanced.

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