

Crime and punishment

by BRIAN LOCKHART

There seems to be a lot more crime in Ontario than there used to be.

Currently there is a massive wave of vehicle thefts obviously being carried out by organized gangs. If you have a nice vehicle and it is stolen from your driveway, it is most likely on a container ship heading overseas within a few days.

Police have made some arrests, however they really have not put much of a dent in these criminal organizations, and even when they do, the courts release criminals who go right back to stealing.

Some people say this isn't a big deal, because the vehicles are insured.

Well, yes, it is a big deal. For starters, you have criminals entering your private property in the middle of the night, which could lead to tragic results if a home owner catches them in the act.

It could be tragic for the criminal or tragic for the home owner, depending on the which person is first to react.

Secondly, people probably have worked hard to save up to buy that vehicle, only to have some low life steal what they have worked hard for.

You may miss time at work because you don't have a vehicle, and then you have to spend time looking for a new car or truck.

Insurance won't cover you for the loss. Insurance will pay only for the current value of a vehicle, not the replacement cost. If your vehicle is stolen, you will now have to pay more to get a new one.

On top of it all, insurance companies don't like losing money. They will make up their losses by charging everyone more for insurance.

We all lose.

At one time, people in Ontario would arrive at a shopping plaza and leave the windows rolled down in their car because it was a hot day. No one was worried that someone walking by would reach into their car to steal something.

A couple of years ago I came out of the local mall and observed a woman walking through the parking lot checking the doors of cars. She was accompanied by a police officer. If the car was open, she would place a notification under the windshield wiper.

It turns out she was a member of some local community policing group.

The notification she left said that you were contributing to crime by leaving your car door unlocked.

I spoke to them politely, and suggested that leaving your car unlocked doesn't mean you're the bad guy. You should be able to leave your car without worrying that someone is going to steal from you.

It's the person that steals from your car that is committing the offence.

By their logic, you have contributed to crime by having an easily penetrated screen door on your patio rather than iron bars.

During the 1970s, New York City had become a cesspool of crime. People couldn't go out at night. Muggings, robberies, murders, and sexual assaults were out of control.

The subways were dangerous and covered inside and out with graffiti.

New York residents had no respect for themselves or their city.

The city was mess.

When mayor Rudy Giuliani was elected, he vowed to turn the city around. He subscribed to the 'community policing' model, as well as the 'broken window' theory.

The 'broken window' theory means you have to tackle crime at the very basic level. If you punish those who commit small crimes, then work your way up, you will eliminate the escalation of other crimes.

It worked. New York is now considered one of the safest large cities in the world.

I know plenty of people who visit New York on a regular basis and never have any problems.

When it comes to punishing crimes, Singapore has a proven method of deterrence - you get beaten with a cane.

I saw an interview with a Canadian man who had committed a stupid crime while in Singapore and was sentenced to five lashes of the cane.

He described being in intense pain that lasted for weeks.

When asked about the experience, he said, 'When you go through that, believe me, you'll never commit another crime for your entire life.'

The crime rate in Singapore is very low.

I don't think going back to corporal punishment is the answer, but neither is letting criminals off with a 'stern warning' from a judge.

Career criminals are not deterred by strong words from an authority figure when they know they will be released and can go back to stealing cars to make money.

You should be able to leave your windows rolled down on a hot day without worrying about your possessions being stolen by some low-life thief.