

2-21-00

Neighborhood Vandalism

Lately I've been reading of vandalism in Chesterfield and Henrico counties: such things as windshields and windows being bashed on every car parked on the curb in a block. Once the damage involved slit tires. But not in our quiet, safe neighborhood! Our street is narrow, not allowing any curbside parking. Paul and I park our cars on a graveled circle in the front yard.

Yesterday afternoon when Paul prepared to leave, he found that an outside rearview mirror had been broken. There were no fallen limbs on the ground to suggest a wind had driven a dead branch against the mirror. When he returned, we found that an outside rearview mirror on my car was in a similar condition. No other damage was visible on either car.

He notified the police. We thought back to the twenty-eight years we've lived in Richmond and recalled the minor vandalism we had experienced here from time to time. For instance, one summer morning, as I was off to the grocery store, the car wouldn't start. Then I noticed that the hood was slightly raised; in those days, the car had an outside release for the hood. I found the battery cables severed. We guessed that someone had been interrupted while trying to steal the battery. Minor but irritating.

Again, we found the wing of the side door smashed soon after we had a state-of-the-art radio and tape player installed in the car. The radio was gone, not a minor incident and certainly more than a little annoying.

When our first granddaughter was born eighteen years ago, we had spent most of the night at St. Mary's Hospital. The next morning, we happily and groggily went to the car to go home. The windshield was shattered by what appeared to have been a baseball bat. But that was across the river, in the hospital parking lot, not in our neighborhood. Our insurance company called a glass installation company, and the windshield was restored promptly by a company which came to our house. Away from our neighborhood, true, but the glass was damaged nonetheless, and it's hard to forget.

Then one day I came home one day to find the side porch door showing damage at the lock. I quickly left the house, realizing that someone could be in the house. I went next door to call the police, who came very promptly and searched the house but found no intruder. They thought perhaps someone, the mail carrier or a meter reader, might have scared the intruders away. A police lieutenant called on us to suggest ways we could make our house more secure. He said the police were watching a family who, they suspected, were entering houses at random in the neighborhood and stealing fairly substantial things, even without regard to whether the occupants were at home. Soon, we heard that they had arrested the culprits responsible for the burglaries. Our crime wave ceased for several years. But almost every householder in the area had security systems installed.

Even petty vandalism seemed to have ceased. But once again several years later the rearview mirrors on both sides of Paul's car were broken. There was a tree limb on one side of the car which could have done the damage. Perhaps. But not on the other side. This was greater damage, comparatively, than any of the other breakage because the mirrors were now in holders that had to be replaced along with the glass.

Then yesterday's vandalism brought it all back to mind and it seems we have such things in our neighborhood again. No inside security system can guard against such destruction. So back to the neighborhood watch alert, again. I speculate that some otherwise nice youngsters are trying to cure their boredom by smacking car mirrors. I hope they're smart enough to cure their boredom some other way. So, we're back to a neighborhood watch, again.