

THE DALLAS POST

EDITORIALS

Authorities must intervene before harm can be done

Once again, the news media have been filled with reports about a young woman who was allegedly killed by a man who had repeatedly abused and threatened her in the past. And once again, we all shook our heads and said something should be done to prevent these heinous crimes, but once again, nothing is likely to change.

Sometimes it's a woman, frequently it's a child, but the pattern remains the same; a man, often in his twenties, asserts himself in the most destructive way, beating and finally killing another person who is smaller and weaker than himself. Sometimes, as in the case of Stephen Schwartz, he then tries to take his own life, finally showing that he is capable of remorse, but it comes far too late for the victim.

The murder is followed by an investigation, during which social service agencies and law enforcement personnel explain that they did all they could to prevent the tragedy, but their response is limited by a court system that is overloaded and by the fact that outside intervention is considered an extreme step, since it tramples on individual and family rights. And absent formal charges from the abused party — which are seldom filed — there is practically no hope of conviction. All of that is true, but it's little consolation for the survivors.

The roots of these tragedies run deep into American society. They range from a genuine concern for individual rights to an irrational and destructive romance with firearms. This combination of the admirable and dangerous seems to have confused the judicial and service systems to the point that inaction is a frequent response to potentially fatal relationships.

At the core of this dilemma is our fascination with violence as the means to solve problems. Just look at the ads for popular movies and books; you'll see gun barrels prominently displayed, often in use. And heroes? Most of the time they are misfits who go outside the law in order to impose their own judgement and penalty on their perceived enemies. Is this mindset a cause of our societal rot, or is it a response to our inability to stop crime by the book? Maybe a bit of both, but since it isn't a new theme, it's probably more of an encouragement than a symptom.

It's time for a change. The maintenance of individual rights is critical to our democratic system, but we cannot consider ourselves truly civilized as long as we let psychopaths torment and harm their victims, even if the victims seem unwilling to help themselves. Threats to murder another person are not protected speech under any reasonable interpretation of the Constitution. Intervention is justified and necessary when the risk of harm becomes great, and there surely have been enough cases when that has occurred.

But punishment alone won't solve the problem. There are forces in our society that combine with private pressures to lead people into destructive relationships. The same spirit of individual initiative that we so often celebrate turns against us when emotional burdens reach the breaking point and we see no way out.

To the extent that it can be done, we need to teach people how to solve problems in a constructive manner, and provide the support and protection they require at critical times. But first, we must remove the opportunity for one person to harm another. Whether that means providing shelter for the abused party or locking the abuser up, it is society's responsibility to do so, just as a parent is expected to break up fights between children.

Another person has died; another child is left without a mother; another community is scarred by violence. It's time we traded a bit of our perceived freedom for a more civilized society.

Cartoon didn't intend to single out police

Some law enforcement officials are upset with the editorial cartoon that appeared in last week's issue of The Post. We also have heard comments that it spoke to the deep-seated feelings of many people that the law enforcement and judicial systems have failed to protect innocent citizens from harm.

The cartoon depicted a man in uniform standing by the grave of Deborah Van Leuven, who was allegedly shot to death by her former boyfriend, who had threatened to kill her in the past. The man is shown saying, "Now we can do something about those threats from your boyfriend, Miss Van Leuven."

Just as an editorial or column is an opinion, an editorial cartoon is the opinion of its maker in visual form. And its purpose, above all else, is to grab the attention of the reader in order to make a point. In this case, the man in uniform was used to signify the system in general, not a particular police department or officer. Unfortunately, it is being received by some readers differently than it was intended.

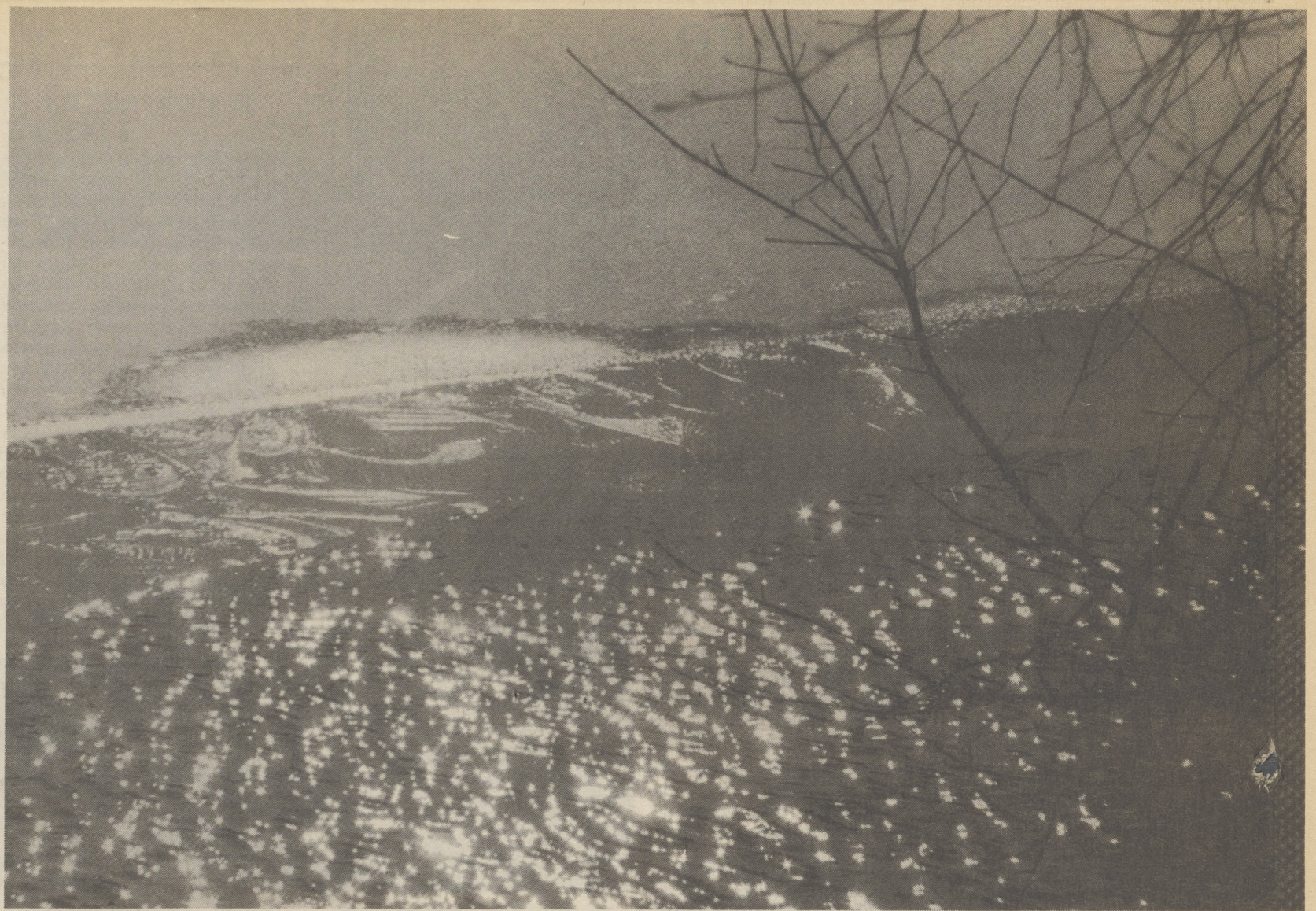
A week earlier, the author of a letter to the editor charged local police with endangering innocent citizens by searching a local restaurant for the suspect. But police officers say they were not in the restaurant seating area. We now realize we should not have published the accusatory letter before talking to police personnel. Undoubtedly, the coincidence of these two items appearing one after the other added to their impact.

The Post's publication of these items was in no way intended to demean the performance of police personnel in the Back Mountain. Local police are often commended for their professionalism and performance, and we have heard very few complaints about them. In a case such as the one involving Miss Van Leuven, police officers frequently express their deep frustration with a system that allows potential killers to walk free.

Opinion items in The Post are not published to offend, but to draw attention to issues of community concern or interest. In the course of doing that, we run the risk of stepping on toes, but in the long run hope that we contribute to the advancement of the community.

Do you agree? Disagree?

Editorials are the opinion of the management of The Dallas Post. We welcome your opinion on contemporary issues in the form of letters to the editor. If you don't write, the community may never hear a contrasting point of view. Send letters to: The Dallas Post, P.O. Box 366, Dallas, PA 18612. Please include your name, address and a daytime phone number so that we may verify authenticity. We reserve the right to edit for length and grammar.



Warm sun and cold water at Frances Slocum Park

Photo by Charlotte Bartizek

Letters

Will higher salaries really make teachers better?

Editor:

We would like to publicly congratulate Dr. Gilbert Griffiths on his new position as assistant superintendent of the Dallas Area School District. The District will now have someone to monitor, evaluate and improve teacher performance on a daily basis.

Although this is not reflective of a true merit system, it certainly is an excellent place to start.

We the Dallas Tax Payers' Forum, however, have some simple questions for Mr. Wagner, representative for the Dallas School Teachers' Union:

1. How can you possibly justify

the school teachers' salary and benefit increase demands? Given the economy today, we must consider the financial stability of the entire community, not only the educational community.

2. Do huge salaries for educators ensure improved quality in the actual educations of our children? Do they equate to better SAT

scores, especially in English? To date, this certainly has not been the case.

The science of the teachers' union perhaps says more about the inability to explain these unrealistic demands.

Thomas Russ
Dallas Tax Payers' Forum

J.W.J.

Better vocational education could help job seekers

By J.W. JOHNSON

There is a clear relationship between a de-emphasis on vocational education and many who find themselves tied to the welfare system. When I've said that in this column before, the response often is something like this:

"I work much better with my hands than trying to speak or write big words. And I wanted to thank you for pointing out that not everybody can be book learners, and that we don't have to be to feel proud of ourselves."

Most readers who write express strong beliefs in the need for vocational education, in the process pointing out that much of the vocational education void has attempted to be filled by private industry, either through correspondence schools, hands-on training or a combination of both.

We've all seen the TV ads: "Learn to drive a truck," or "be a welder and earn big money," etc., etc. And, with the exceptions of road maintenance, the post office and defense, I'm all for private industry doing just about anything in place of public institutions, be they governmental or educational.

However, many of those so-called private vocational educa-

tion schools are primarily in business to lure dollars from ill-informed students, and not in the business of providing an education.

Part of the reason for this is that students who would be drawn to such hype are not prepared to make judgments about the quality of such courses; to expect otherwise begs the question of a need for vocational education in the first place. This, of course, speaks even more loudly to the need for more vocational training in the public education system where the entire process is subject to public scrutiny, higher standards, and more stringent expectations.

Be all this as it may, it does appear that some of you want more vocational training for your children. And the results of a national survey several years ago suggests that parents and teachers are not entirely happy with our educational system in general. For example:

—87 per cent of teachers said parents are too permissive.

—40 per cent of teachers are very satisfied with their jobs. (This compares with 52 per cent of the total public, and the biggest complaint seems to be that teachers feel they are primarily there to

'manage' as opposed to 'teach' students.)

—40 per cent of teachers are more negative about teaching now than when they first started.

—33 per cent would leave the teaching profession for another job even if the salary were no more than what they are making now.

—52 per cent think busing has not helped minorities get a better education.

—20 per cent said that the higher standards created by reform have led to a higher student drop out rate in their schools.

Teachers, in general, said they were blamed far too much for society's ills; instead, that much of the blame can be laid at the feet of:

—A mushrooming school bureaucracy having a negative effect on their work in the classroom. In 1960 there were 40,000 school districts in the U.S.; today there are 16,000. At the same time, over the past 20 years, the number of principals and supervisors has increased 83 per cent while the number of teachers has increased 64 per cent.

—Television and the image it creates for students that they would be 'entertained' in the classroom.

—Perhaps, most importantly,

teachers said that poor attitudes toward learning and little parent involvement with a child's education at home, were important factors in 'why Johnny can't read.'

The at-home factor cannot be stressed enough. If parents continue to believe that it is the sole responsibility of public education to educate their children, then the quality of education will suffer. And paying lip service to involvement by joining a parent/school group does not entirely address the real issue:

The child must perceive that learning—vocational or otherwise—is not just a function of textbooks and classroom routine. He or she must come to understand that education is a lifelong process, and not something to be endured until one is old enough to quit.

This is where parents becoming involved with their child's education at home can make the critical difference between a child who becomes educated and a child who is attended; a child who was presented information and a child who learned.

And ultimately, this means the difference between a society which, in all ways, either prospers or declines.

Library news

New book alleges anti-feminist 'Backlash'

By NANCY KOZEMCHAK

The Back Mountain Memorial Library circulated 5,312 books during the month of December; 3,333 adult titles and 1,979 juvenile. Reference questions totaled 287 and Book Club books circulated 236. There were 96 new books added; 273 re-registrations and 67 new borrowers added. Interlibrary loan transactions totaled 32 and 147 books were withdrawn from the collection. Current book inventory stands at 57,755.

The 1992 Book Club membership has reached 106 with \$965. in dues collected to date. This money will be used to purchase books for the Book Club shelf. Dues is \$10 for a single membership and \$15 for a double. Membership is open to the public and the dues may be paid at the library circulation desk or mailed to the library. The Book Club shelf is located near the front of the library and new members are always welcome.

New books at the library: "Backlash" by Susan Faludi is the undeclared war against American women. The book is a disturbing

examination of women's crumbling status in American life and culture during the past decade. This backlash has worked on two levels: Convincing women that their feelings of dissatisfaction and distress are the result of too much feminism and independence, while simultaneously undermining the minimal progress that women have made at work, in politics, and in their own minds. This book was purchased with funds from the Friends Christmas "Donate a Book Tree."

Two new large print books donated by the Dallas Lions Club are: "The Song of the Lark" by Willa Cather is the story of a young woman's awakening as an artist and her struggle to escape the constraints of a small town in Colorado. A passionate and talented woman, Thea Kronborg follows her ambition but never leaves behind the strength and courage she derives from her heritage. This is a vivid portrait of western prairie life.

"Detection Unlimited" by Georgette Heyer is a large print book

which describes the surprising death of the much disliked Sampson Warrenby involving the best people in Thornden, including the squire, the vicar and the family solicitor. Warrenby was an upstart—he'd only been 15 years in the district—and he had a way of ruffling everyone's feathers. No one had really expected he would be found slumped on a wooden seat under the oak in his garden

with a bullet in his head. Scandals relentlessly come to light.

"Lost and Found" by Marilyn Harris is a Book Club book that takes us into America's dust bowl in 1930, where Martha Drusso's adopted daughter, three year old Belle, is put on the wrong train by her stepbrother. A dramatic story of love, acceptance, and belonging.

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