

# The Dallas Post

## EDITORIALS

### Police officer's trial raises questions about use of 'discretion'

Whether or not justice truly was served by last week's acquittal of Ronald Spock on bribery charges, serious questions have been raised about the conduct of police work in Harveys Lake. And reaction to the case leads to equally serious questions about the standard of behavior for both police officers and the public in Luzerne County.

A jury ruled that Spock, the assistant police chief, was not guilty of accepting a bribe in failing to press charges against Peter Achey of Wilkes-Barre, who Spock had stopped December 15, 1991 for suspected drunken driving. Achey wouldn't allow a blood alcohol test to be taken and could have lost his driver's license for a year because of his refusal to do so.

The next day, a friend of Achey visited Spock at his home to ask if anything could be done to get Achey off the hook. Spock says he first refused to intervene, but softened when the friend pleaded that if Achey lost his driver's license his auto inspection and sales licenses also would be revoked and he, Achey, would lose his business.

Then Achey's friend asked Spock if there was anything Achey could do for the Harveys Lake Police Department. Spock replied that their television wasn't working and the donation of a new one would be appreciated. Three days later, Achey appeared at the department with a new 20-inch color television set wrapped in brown paper, and presented it to Spock. Spock never filed the paperwork that would have resulted in Achey losing his license.

The jury apparently accepted the argument that Spock had decided to drop charges before the television was offered or delivered, therefore it was a gift of thanks and not a bribe.

This case may be over, but many important questions remain. In his testimony, Spock made the point that a police officer's discretion is his greatest asset, a sentiment echoed after the trial by Luzerne County District Attorney Peter Paul Olszewski. That may be true in the case of a juvenile who breaks a window, or an upstanding citizen who forgets to use a turn signal, but it is out-of-place in a drunk driving case. Half or more of fatal auto accidents involve an intoxicated driver, and that offense should be one in which discretion is used sparingly, if ever.

And just what is the basis for this discretion? Peter Achey didn't live in Harveys Lake, and apparently wasn't known to Spock. He didn't even have the backbone to talk to Spock directly but asked a friend to intervene in his favor. It shouldn't be that easy for a police officer—who is charged with upholding the law—to forgive and forget so serious an offense.

Then there's the public reaction to the verdict. Incredibly, most people who commented on the case in newspaper and radio interviews sympathized with Achey and defended his right to drive under the influence. But you can bet they wouldn't feel the same way if next week a drunk driver bashed their car and killed a member of their family.

Judging by the comments of his friends and acquaintances at Harveys Lake, Ron Spock is a well-respected, competent police officer and a responsible citizen. But he's not perfect and neither is the system he works in. The entire episode would have been avoided if Spock and other police officers had less discretion and more incentive to follow the letter of the law. Discretion, like beauty, can be in the eye of the beholder, and its use in this case put Spock in the unenviable position of having his ethics questioned in full public view.

And what of the two officers who reported the incident and testified against Spock at his trial. They apparently were willing to risk their careers by informing the State Police about the arrival of the television and its connection to a drunk driving case. Now, their status with the department is under scrutiny; they'll surely think twice before speaking up again.

Every citizen should be concerned if the kind of discretion practiced by Ron Spock in this case occurs every day. Because of it, a suspected drunk driver is still roaming the streets and all police officers' trustworthiness is suspect. Less discretion and more adherence to the statutes would make life easier for the police and law-abiding citizens, and tougher for lawbreakers. That's how it should be.

### About the opinion pages

The Dallas Post attempts to publish opinions on a variety of topics in many forms. Editorials, which are the opinion of the management of The Post, appear on the editorial page. Cartoons are the opinion of the cartoonist and columns are the opinion of the author. Neither necessarily reflects the viewpoint of The Post.

Letters to the editor are welcome and will be published subject to the following guidelines. Letters must not exceed 500 words. Except in unusual circumstances, no writer may have more than one letter published during a 30 day period. Letters must be signed and include the writer's home town and a telephone number for verification. Names will be withheld only if there exists a clear threat to the writer. The Post retains the right to accept or reject any letter and to edit letters as necessary without distorting their meaning.

In addition to letters to the editor, we welcome longer pieces that may be run as columns. The author or the subject's relevance to the Back Mountain will be our prime consideration when selecting material for publication.

To submit an item for publication, send it to: The Dallas Post, P.O. Box 366, Dallas, PA 18612, or bring it to our office.



Winter settles in Orange

Photo by Charlotte Bartizek

J.W.J.

### Hatred and bigotry can't be legislated away

By J.W. JOHNSON

Item: Three white teenagers kill a black man by setting him on fire, and do so only because he's black. One of the young men now agrees to talk, saying he was astounded that his friends had set the man on fire. "They could have just shot him," he said.

Item: Four black men abduct, rape and then murder a white woman, and do so only because she is white. One of the men justifies the crime by saying vengeance is warranted because of 400 years of oppression by the white man.

Item: And perhaps most importantly of all, a recent broad based survey conducted by the publishers of "Who's Who in American High School Students" reveals that while some strides have been made, racial prejudice by both whites and blacks continues as part of the thought process for our nation's young people.

And if you think the first two items above happened in our dark past, think again, folks. Both happened in the last 90 days...right here in the good old U.S. of A. The land of the free and the home of the brave...empty, sickening words, of course, to the families these horrors left behind.

Other than the revulsion conjured up by both of these crimes, this column presents them and the high school student survey as, once again, concrete examples of this nation's most pressing social problem: racism.

Oh, it will be argued, and in particular by those now out of work, or by those whose standard of living has now been lowered,

that this nation's most pressing problem is the growing income gap between the have's and have nots. And there's some merit to that argument.

But the roots of racism are deeper than one's next meal. They are in fact part of the soil which grows the food for our meals...fed by the fertilizer of ignorance, acquiring the water and sunshine to feed this hatred from parents, simply because of a difference in skin color.

It starts with the "they"...each group referring to the other as "they", you must first have an us, thus setting up the foundation of them against us. That 'they' is a different skin color only makes the target easier to point out and focus upon.

That the skin color represents all that white people are taught as children as being bad only makes the hatred easier to promote without asking why, i.e.

Darkness to a child equals fear. Black and brown are dark. If you can't see it and identify it in the night then it's to be feared. Mistrusted.

Eventually hated. And now even more so that the United States government in its infinite ignorance has attempted to legislate love of fellow humans through job quota systems and other forms of anti-discrimination...all of which are viewed by even tolerant whites as empirically unfair.

We are now into a new federal administration...whose chief domestic concern will not be urban policy, but health care. And if any of the major polling organizations had, even just two weeks before

all hell broke loose in Los Angeles, asked Americans about what were the major issues facing this nation, the question of urban policy wouldn't have even made the list.

And we all now know why the thin veneer of civilization disappeared in the fires and bullets of Los Angeles: white cops beat black traffic violator; jury finds white cops innocent; black citizens riot in protest; more than 50 die and more than \$1 billion in damages result.

That's the superficial answer, but the real answers lie beneath centuries of ignorance and fear. And to put to rest this issue right up front. There is absolutely no doubt that some black people in Los Angeles used the Rodney King verdict as an excuse to steal what they couldn't otherwise afford to buy.

And there are many bigots out there just waiting to parade before us the video taped obvious in support for their already drawn conclusions. These bigots ignore that if the situation were reversed, just as many white people, because looting isn't a function of one's skin color, it's a result of frustration and/or greed meeting opportunity.

And to further dismiss the entire question of how this society, both through its citizen interaction and governmental reaction, deals with racial questions, is the height of black and white ignorance.

But to ignore the societal plea typified by the killing of the white woman and black man noted above is to, once again, go whistling past the graveyard of a despicably larger arrogance.

### Only yesterday

#### 60 Years Ago - Feb. 17, 1933 TALBOT FUND HELPS AREA SCHOOLS

An operetta, "Eny-Meeny-Miney-Mo" will be presented by students of Dallas Borough High School in the high school auditorium Feb. 23. Production is directed by Madge Anderson and is expected to be one of the best ever given in this section.

Dallas Borough and Kingston Township have both benefitted their school systems by the employment of emergency relief workers in the improvement of their buildings and grounds by work done under the Talbot Fund.

Dallas Borough High School defeated Laketon 27-22. Had Laketon won, Dallas would again be in a 2-way tie with Trucksville. As the standings are now, Dallas has an undisputed position in first place; Trucksville 2nd; Laketon and Lehman tied for 3rd; Beaumont and Dallas in 4th and 5th place respectively.

#### 50 Years Ago - Feb. 12, 1943 MARINE SHARES WAR STORIES OF PACIFIC

Twenty eight Back Mountain men, many of them from the 18 year old age group will take their final physicals at Wilkes-Barre Induction Center next Tuesday. They are part of a big contingent of 114 men called for induction by Local Board #1 of Wyoming. Those who qualify in their final exams will no doubt leave for military service February 23.

Seated in his mother's home, Carl Carey, 19-year-old Trucksville Marine veteran of Guadalcanal fighting and survivor of the ill-fated Lexington, related his experiences. Wounded at the battle of Grassy Knoll he was evacuated from Guadalcanal and taken to the base hospital in Brisbane, Australia, where he spent seven weeks before he returned home.

#### 40 Years Ago - Feb. 13, 1953 DR. OWENS RETURNS FROM GERMANY

Daddow-Isaacs Post 672, American Legion has presented a check for \$125 to Wyoming Valley Council of Boy Scouts to be used to purchase a Boy Scout training film.

Dr. and Mrs. Roger Owens and children who spent the last two years in Germany where Dr. Owens was a Dentist Councillor for the 1st Div. returned home Friday. He will resume his practice in Dallas today.

Beaumont PTA will sponsor "Amateur Night" March 5 at Beaumont High School. Anyone interested is invited to participate.

Annual World Day of Prayer will be held next Friday at 2 p.m. in the Dallas United Methodist Church. Theme of the program will be "Walk As Children of Light."

#### 30 Years Ago - Feb. 14, 1963 NEW COMMUNITY BAND BEGINS REHEARSALS

Raymon R. Hedden, chairman for special gifts for the Back Mountain Heart Fund Drive, working three weeks on this assignment reports to date receipts amount to \$534.

Former members of the now-defunct Dr. Henry M. Laing Fire Co. Band, are enthusiastically supporting the new Community Band each Thursday at Dallas Senior High. Anyone who plays from Ross Township, Harveys Lake, Centermoreland as well as Dallas is invited to join up.

The Library Auction has already received a truckload of furniture from the home of the late Margaret Dykman and on Monday it had a bonus from Bob Elpper who delivered a genuine Jenny Lind cord bed with spool spindles to The Barn.

#### 20 Years Ago - Feb. 15, 1973 BOY SCOUTS OBSERVE 63RD ANNIVERSARY

Back Mountain Boy Scouts are celebrating their 63rd anniversary. The first troop in the area and one of the earliest troops in the country according to D.A. Waters of Dallas was chartered in Dallas late 1910 or early 1911. Troop #1 received its charter directly from National Headquarters in New York.

Two Dallas residents, Alexander Wazeter and Donald E. Wallace are among the 85 candidates for the Wilkes-Hahnemann Cooperative Medical Education program in family medicine, began their second semester in the innovative program which allows successful individuals to receive their undergraduate baccalaureate and doctor of medicine degrees in six years.

Lake-Lehman girls basketball team enjoying a good season in "B" Division of Wyoming Conference ended the first half with a 5-1 record.

### Library news

#### Barbie doll collection on display at library

By NANCY KOZEMCHAK

The Back Mountain Memorial Library display case is featuring a collection of Barbie dolls and Barbie furniture borrowed from Shannon Rother of Dallas. Shannon is 9 years old and in second grade at Dallas Elementary School. Her collection began when she was two years old and Mommy and Daddy gave her a Barbie doll for her birthday. The doll had a peach dress on when she received it; she is featured in our display, however, she is wearing a hand made crocheted long dress which was made for the doll by Shannon's grandmother. The dress is a Spanish sundress. Shannon owns about 12 dolls altogether and she receives new ones regularly for Christmas and her birthday.

She recently celebrated her 9th birthday and received dolls from her friends, Yolanda and Lacey. The new dolls are in the display; one is standing by the entertainment center and the other is sitting on the couch. She has a few pieces of the dollhouse, condos,

and a car at home with the other dolls. There are two rugs featured in the display, handmade by her grandmother and all the furniture included was made by her grandmother, Bette Jayne Kovich of Pocono Pines. This special furniture is made with plastic canvas art and the furniture includes the entertainment center with television and VCR and speakers, a lamp and tables in the living room section, with the couch and a chair with ottoman.

The dining room segment features dining table, four chairs, corner cupboard, and hutch. Bedroom has a bed, wardrobe, dresser and chair. All furniture has drawers and doors. The display features five Barbie dolls. This exciting display will certainly make the groundhog's forecast of six more weeks of winter more bearable. This shows the special bond between Shannon and her grandmother. The display will be at the library until March 3.

New books at the library: *Boil-*

ing Point by Kevin Phillips is the story of Democrats, Republicans and the decline of middle-class prosperity. In the election of 1992, support for George Bush plunged to a level below Herbert Hoover's in 1932 as many middle-class suburbs voted Democratic and Ross Perot surged. The author shows how this populist explosion revealed a powerful new political force: widespread frustration over the decline of middle-class prosperity and the threat to the American dream. This is the politics of the 1990's.

*Making the Mummies Dance* by Thomas Hoving takes us inside the Metropolitan Museum of Art. No museum in the world is like it and no man has ever run it, or revolutionized it, quite like Thomas Hoving. In a decade he changed almost everything people had grown accustomed to from the Met, shaking the institution out of royal repose and transforming it into the most vital cultural presence in the country. A story of power struggles and one upmanship.

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