

Only Dead Trees Sleep Like Logs

At 3 AM, glass shattered the silent night and woke her from sleep. My friend, who has loved her home and her neighborhood for nearly twenty years, jumped out of bed as the back door opened and footsteps violated the inner sanctum of her living room.

Instinctively reaching for her cell phone to dial 911, she rushed to the bedroom door in hopes of securing the one thin boundary between herself and her intruders. The thieves' unbidden entry had triggered the alarm system, automatically signaling trouble to the security firm while piercing the nocturnal hush with a deafening siren that could be heard throughout the house and probably as far as a block away. Still, the strangers advanced, tossing furniture, stashing valuables. The lap top, her purse and wallet full of identification and credit cards. My friend screamed, imploring them to leave. The cops were on their way, she yelled. Ignoring the threat, they suddenly were at her inner door, trying to force their way through the minimally secured threshold to where my defenseless friend awaited her fragile fate. Who knows why the men ultimately reconsidered, darting out into the protection of darkness minutes before the police and a neighbor arrived to assure my friend she was safe.

Safe from further danger for the moment. Still stinging to this day, and for how long hereafter, with the awful violation of her personal peace and security. Over the past week, as she repaired her home, canceled her cards and replaced her documents, my friend continues to ache. Now she suffers from fear that her written history and her human contacts are in the hands of men who may repeatedly invade her inner life much as once they attacked her outer shell. Physical illness followed almost immediately on the heels of the break-in. Sleepless tossing robs her yet of the essential restoration we need and normally receive from nighttime rest. Her dog even acts strangely, whining incessantly, clinging fearfully and moving constantly. The house no longer provides sanctuary from the emotional noises of the material and spirit world.

3 AM again. This time, a few miles down the road in our same city. Here, this night as most nights, neighbors live with the anticipation of dread possibilities. They even know their likely assailants. They understand the criminals' desperate circumstances since the whole community inhabits a common despair. Residents of these streets and homes grew up frying their nervous systems on the fires of fear, vulnerability, unpredictability and, worst of all, the neglect of a careless society. Instead of expecting to be protected by the power of love and the right to justice, my friend's distant neighbors have habituated to the weakening force of indignity, hopelessness and self-doubt. The only thing they can count on is that the police do not trust them and will not likely inspire their trust in return. How much less is a life worth in one zip code than in another?

3 AM in a neighborhood in another country. A place that has known only warfare and street violence for as long as the past several generations can remember. Yet here, too, children are born every day. And, every night, the youngest huddle in fear that their roof will implode, bullets may render false the security of their humble shelter, their father will be removed or their mother violated, their teacher could disappear as might their food, their faith and their future.

From middle class to Middle East, doves still fly innocently above realities on the ground that block our paths to peace. We who grew up lucky enough to regard the meaning of existence, must now martial our sensibilities. We have to recognize the great, perhaps even the final chance we have to assert the only hope for survival – of civil society, of the life-sustaining earth itself. All together, we need to act on the truth that each person is born with equal dignity, and that when given an equal and adequate measure of essential resources, children everywhere will feel valued and grow to care about themselves and others. Then, I feel absolutely certain that doors in every home in every community will no longer have to close to the dangers of fellow citizens. With alarms silenced by trust earned in a just society, we will open our doors to welcome encounters with new visitors and old friends. In shattering the glass walls of inequity, indignity and isolation, we will erect a solid security system, one built on human interdependence, mutual respect and caring. All we really have to fear is our fear of looking into the souls of our sisters and brothers and seeing ourselves.