

Opinion

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Why no outcry for dog's victim

WHAT IS THE public outcry for Gertrude Monroe?
Calls and letters have been coming to this and other newspapers, radio and TV stations, most of them urging that King Boots be saved. Some have gone so far as to say King Boots is really a nice, even gentle dog who was only protecting himself.

If you haven't already read or heard about King Boots, he's the former national champion Old English sheepdog local police and medical authorities say mauled and killed the 87-year-old mother of the woman who, along with her husband, owns the dog. The incident took place Dec. 19 in Birmingham.

The owners have been fighting a Birmingham legal move to have the dog destroyed because of his "vicious habits." The owners maintain that the dog was protecting itself after the victim fell on him. They further maintain that the woman's death was actually caused by a heart attack and not by the injuries inflicted by the dog.

At the conclusion of the court hearing Tuesday, Judge Edward Sosnick ruled that King Boots would be destroyed in 21 days, but gave the owners a way to save its life. The owners have the option of having the dog neutered, his fangs pulled and confining him to their home.

ALMOST EVERYONE knows who King Boots is — he's become a media star, appearing on TV network news programs and papers not only in this country but throughout Europe too.

We know he's being pampered by his owners who take special food to him at the Birmingham dog pound where he's been in custody, that he's being visited and

groomed regularly. We've also read accounts of the prizes he's won as a show dog.

But who is Gertrude Monroe?
She was the elderly, frail woman apparently suffering from mental confusion associated with old age and other physical ailments. She was the victim. She's the one no one outside the courtroom and those closest to the case seem to be talking about.

She was the human being King Boots bit into, ripping her neck and head and puncturing her carotid artery, a major vessel which carries blood to the brain.
She's the one in gruesome photographs presented in court by the chief plastic surgeon at William Beaumont Hospital who examined her the night she died.

WE'RE FRANKLY disgusted with the public outcry favoring the dog.

Whether the dog's attack on the elderly Mrs. Monroe was the primary cause of death or a contributing cause is immaterial. The dog viciously wounded the poor, helpless woman. And, according to testimony, she was not the only person attacked by King Boots.

Gentle dogs are abused every day, often unintentionally by children. But the dogs don't react violently.

We really know nothing about Gertrude Monroe. No one's written or called to ask if she had a good life, or to say that she will be missed.

Has our respect for human life deteriorated to the point that Mrs. Monroe is simply forgotten in all of this dog circus?

We're also wondering if the outcry would have been different if the victim had been a 3-year-old child instead of an 87-year-old woman.



Don't miss board in action

MANY REPORTERS dread covering meetings.

Sure, sitting and drinking coffee and taking notes all evening is a cushy way to come up with a few quick stories. It certainly beats standing outside in the cold watching a nuclear arms protest or trying to get a corporate public relations person to cough up information.

But public business can be tedious, officials long-winded, the chairs hard. Sitting alone in the front row taking down details of a street paving while officials eye you nervously or make nasty cracks about "the media" — well, it can make you wish you were home nursing a cold.

And there's always the thought that if residents don't care enough to turn out, why should you bother?

AT LEAST that's how I looked at it a year ago when I left editing to become a reporter again. One big question I had was "how many" (really, "how few") meetings would be required in the new job?

I was convinced our suburban papers cover too many meetings in too much detail. How many readers really want to know what happened on the way to the new sewer? Isn't it enough to report the result?

Nearly 100 meetings later, I've finally



Kathy Parrish

grasped the value of community journalism at its dullest.

DRIVING HOME from a lengthy meeting of the Oakland Community College board of trustees last week, I ran through the events of the turbulent session.

"Thank God we were there," I thought.
Readers deserve to know what happens at sessions where their taxes are being spent. They also need to be aware of how the people spending that money behave as they're doing it.

The fact is, some officials transact public business in a rude manner we'd never tolerate in our homes or workplaces. My 11-year-old son had better not behave like some adult lawmakers do.

IN A SESSION that was painful to watch, OCC trustees refused to extend President Robert F. Roelofs' contract for another year. Despite a very favorable evaluation by the board a year ago and the

support of faculty representatives, the 66-year-old president will retire against his will June 30.

The board's 4-3 decision resulted from months of deteriorating relations between Roelofs and the four trustees who voted against his request. Much of that was also painful viewing, with personal attacks flying back and forth.

At one point, the president declared, "I'm not going to listen to a bunch of idiots any longer."

THOSE WHO voted against the contract extension refused to give reasons why, saying only that Roelofs refused to work with them. Angry, the feisty president accused the split board of wanting an administrator who is "four-sevenths wimp and three-sevenths leader."

When a compromise extension of six months was also turned down, Roelofs supporter trustee Sandra Ritter voted with the majority. "I'm voting 'no,' Mr. Roelofs, and I'll tell you why. I wouldn't subject you to one more minute of this s---," the Waterford trustee said emphatically, telling me to make sure I printed the quote.

Sighing, I wrote it all down. And pledged myself never to miss another moment of government in action.

No magic clues for lost children

IT HAS BEEN eight years since this area was gripped by the fear of child abductions and murders. It has been a long time since the bodies of four 11-14-year-olds were found in Troy, Southfield, Franklin Village and Livonia during the winters of 1976 and 1977.

Police officials believed one person — dubbed the "Oakland County child killer" — was responsible for the deaths.

At one time 150 police officers from Wayne, Oakland and State Police forces worked on the case.

It was never solved.

"TODAY THE investigation is being handled by one state trooper who reviews leads and maintains contact with police agencies," Oakland County deputy Steve Powell said last week. Powell was meeting with a group of suburban parents.

What happened to the child killer, the parents asked.

"What's your theory?" Powell answered. "It's as good as mine. Everyone has a theory. All we know for sure is that the killings stopped. They may never be solved."

Powell said investigators from Seattle are in this area studying the work of the 150-person task force. Seattle has recently had several child killings. Although it never solved the murders, the Oakland County task force has become a national model for police regional cooperation in murder investigations.

POWELL MET with the parents to discuss techniques for preventing child abductions. In the years since the Oakland County killings, some of the interest in child murders has subsided, he said.

He started by dismissing the advice usually given to children: "Don't talk to strangers."

"In 80 percent of the cases, a child is taken by someone he knows," Powell said. "It's the neighbor or a family friend most of the time. The case of a stranger who drives into a neighborhood and picks a child off the street doesn't happen often."

Typically, the abductor is known by the child. It is often someone trusted — a friendly neighbor, a person who swings the child in the park.



Nick Sharkey

According to Powell, better advice would be: "Don't let strangers touch you." If this happens a child should be told to run away as quickly as possible.

HE GAVE SOME specific tips.

- Buy distinctive clothing for your child. Bright or reflective clothing helps to identify your child in a crowd. It's fairly easy to find a child wearing a lime green jacket with a tiger on the back.

- Have the child's fingerprints taken. Both Oakland and Wayne County sheriff's departments have fingerprinting programs. In addition, for the next 14 weeks all Farmer Jack supermarkets will fingerprint children. Fingerprints help when it is believed that a child may have been held in a specific car or house.

- Keep current records on a child so you know his or her height, weight, shoe size and blood type. A recent photograph of the child standing upright helps police officers looking for the child.

- Label all clothing, shoes and hats. These identify any clothing that may be found during a search.

- Introduce your child to neighbors and owners of local businesses near your home. Let your child know that in time of trouble, these persons can help.

REMINd ANY PARENT of the Oakland County child killer, and you can almost see the parent start shaking. Parents have no greater fear than having a child abducted and murdered.

Yet, some do little to prevent an abduction.

As Detective Steve Powell told parents last week, "The police have no secret methods for finding lost children. We must have your cooperation."

A good place to start may be to take your child to the local Farmer Jack supermarket this weekend for fingerprinting.

Executions vs. seat belts

THE STATE Legislature is now into the area of executions, thanks to a bill introduced by state Sen. Dan DeGrow, who proposes that voters decide whether the state should continue its ban on capital punishment.

DeGrow predicts that the Legislature eventually will approve his bill and put the proposal on the 1986 state ballot.

The state constitution now forbids the death penalty, and the state hasn't carried out an execution in more than 100 years.

Best guess is that the Legislature will have little trouble passing DeGrow's bill. After all, legislators don't have to deal with the advisability of executing people. So why not look like you're doing something by passing the responsibility on to the public?

AT THE SAME time, it isn't so easy passing a state law which would require drivers and front-seat passengers to wear seat belts.

The last time it was attempted, the measure fell four votes short in the House. State Rep. William Keith, D-Garden City, who voted against the seat belt proposal, explained that the majority of his constituents do not want government telling them they have to wear seat belts. The theory is that if a person wants to



Bob Wisler

be a fool and not wear a seat belt and subsequently gets into a fatal accident, so be it. It is his right, his decision.

IF GOVERNMENT has no right to order people to protect themselves from death, does it have the right to put others to death?

According to the logic of the anti-seat belt and pro-executions, the difference is this: Whereas society is not responsible for saving a foolish person from harming himself, it is responsible for protecting society's members from other people who may want to harm them.

Nowadays, even capital punishment backers acknowledge that there is little proof to show that capital punishment actually deters people from killing other people. This is mostly because the vast majority of people who kill do not plan it out or give it thoughtful reflection before committing the deed.

L. Brooks Patterson, the state's leading proponent of capital punishment, maintains that it doesn't really matter if such punishment acts as a deterrent. The Oakland prosecutor says it is an appropriate punishment for certain heinous crimes — sort of a sophisticated version of the ancient "eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" brand of retribution.

Some maintain that executing a murderer, if nothing else, ensures that that murderer won't kill again.

WHATEVER THE merits of capital punishment — almost none, in our opinion — the Legislature certainly should be as willing to go as far with seat belt legislation as it does with executions.

If the state can take a life in an attempt to stop certain crimes, it certainly can dictate actions that probably will save lives.

The same government can intrude into private lives by deciding that use of cocaine and other "dangerous" drugs is harmful to the individual and provide for stiff enforcement and penalties.

We could do at least as much for the free spirits who would rather be unfettered in their cars rather than have a government tell 'em what to do. Even if it kills them.