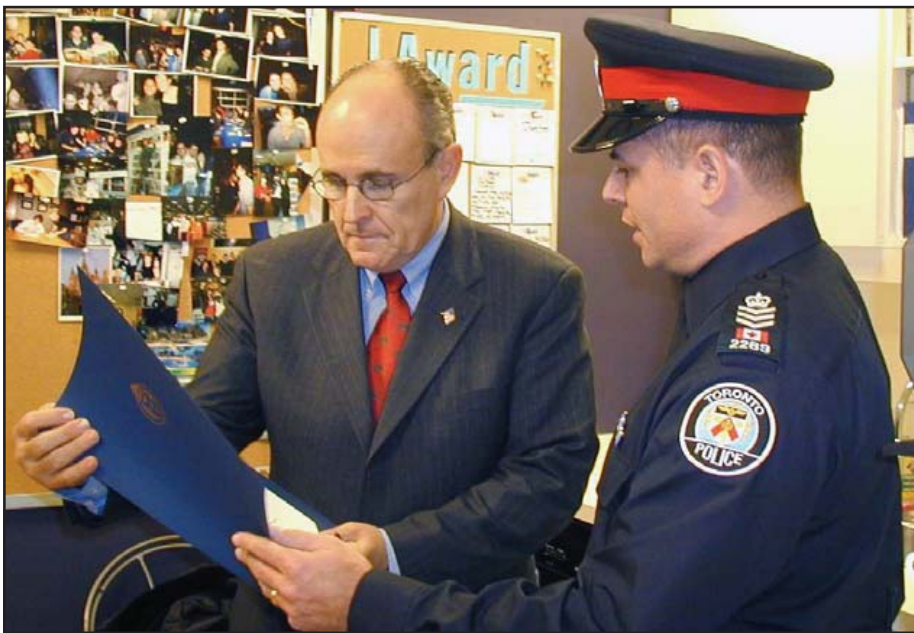


Broken windows or broken dreams

The truth behind the theory



by Carlotta Brittinger

It has been over 22 years since the ground-breaking 'broken windows' theory was first introduced and published by distinguished criminologists George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson.

Broken windows described the relationship between visible public disorder (graffiti, abandoned buildings, public drinking, street corner prostitution, panhandling, etc) and its link to more serious crime and urban decay.

Kelling co-authored another work in 1996, this time with Catherine Coles, entitled *Fixing broken windows: Restoring order and reducing crime in our communities*. In both, the image of broken windows is cleverly used to explain how neighbourhoods might decline into disorder and serious crime if no one attends faithfully to their maintenance. If the windows are not repaired, people seeing this assume that no one is in charge of the building, street or neighbourhood.

Criminals exploit the disorder, involve themselves in criminal activity and capitalize on community fear. Both physical and social disorder conditions combine to create a criminogenic environment, which eventually leads to more serious crime and ultimately lowers the quality of life within the community.

Fast forward to 2005. Is the theory, which has been debated by politicians, police chiefs and community safety pundits, still relevant? Toronto Police S/Sgt Heinz Kuck, an internationally recognized expert in disorder management and graffiti vandalism, thinks so.

The broken windows theory is based on both broad academic research and empirical policing experience, says Kuck and supported by other studies, including a six year effort by Wesley Skogan, who looked at how crime is perceived in major US cities. He interviewed

more than 13,000 and separated their perceptions into social and physical disorder.

The end result was that smaller crime issues such as graffiti, street corner prostitution, open drug use and drunken behaviour not only made people concerned about their physical safety but caused them to cocoon (go out less frequently) and/or move out of the neighbourhood.

A study in 2003 by the London School of Economics found a correlation between property damage crime and real estate prices, Kuck says, and suggested that property values dropped 1.6 per cent for every 10 per cent increase in vandalism.

Kuck had the honour of meeting with then New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, who is a firm believer in the broken windows theory. Giuliani put in place a hard hitting, zero tolerance initiative targeting what Americans call 'misdemeanour crimes' – we refer to them as summary conviction crimes and provincial statute violations. New York's murder and serious crime rates plummeted after the crackdown.

Analysis indicated that 28 misdemeanor arrests resulted in one less violent crime; over a ten year period, it's estimated New Yorkers were spared from 60,000 violent crimes.

Fighting serious crime by addressing neighbourhood disorder still has incredible value, says Kuck. While police services and the people they serve should prioritize crimes such as murder, sexual assault and robbery, he says, they must also never forget the impact and importance of maintaining a safe community by fixing broken windows.

Carlotta Brittinger is a Toronto freelance writer and novelist who can be reached at catharsisgroup@sympatico.ca. S/Sgt. **Heinz Kuck** will be presenting a number of policing theories, including an in-depth analysis of broken windows, April 26 and 27 at the *Blue Line Trade Show*. Visit www.blueline.ca/tradeshow to register or for more information. Kuck can be contacted at 416 808-5354.

DISPATCHES



Solicitor General **Rich Coleman** says the BC government is considering regulating stores that sell hydroponic equipment as a way of cracking down on the marijuana trade. Coleman said in November his officials are studying a proposed law that would force hydroponic equipment sellers to keep a registry of their buyers, which could then be forwarded to police. Coleman said the proposed registry would be similar to the regulations facing Vancouver pawn shops, which now have electronic links to police tracking property crimes.



Deputy Prime Minister **Anne McLellan** said in November that the federal government won't step into a dispute over RCMP policy that left widows of officers killed in the line of duty burdened with large funeral bills. **Kathy Maurice, Marg Galloway** and **Lesley Massey** were all left with bills of up to \$21,000 after their husbands were killed in the line of duty. The women say the reimbursements they got from the RCMP did not reflect actual costs of the funerals.

Sherwood Park Conservative MP **Ken Epp** raised the issue in the House of Commons. He said the current Treasury Board policy regarding RCMP funeral expenses is outrageous and said it needs to be changed.

Epp said the RCMP should reimburse any widow of an officer killed on duty who had to pay funeral expenses.

McLellan said the Treasury Board was reviewing the RCMP's and Canadian Armed Force's policies on regimental or ceremonial funerals.

The widows received offers of financial support from the public and the Edmonton Police Service Association to help offset the costs of their husbands' funerals after their plight was publicized. The women said they appreciated the generosity, but felt any financial assistance should come from the RCMP.



Two Saskatoon police officers at the centre of a controversy over the freezing death of an aboriginal teenager 14 years ago were fired in November. Constables **Larry Hartwig** and **Bradley Senger** had been on suspension with pay after an inquiry found that they had **Neil Stonechild** in their custody in the hours before his 1990 death. At a November news conference, Police Chief **Russell Sabo** said the constables were dismissed for failing to diligently and promptly report or provide information to officials that Stonechild was in their custody. The inquiry report by Justice **David Wright** rejected police claims that the officers had no involvement with the 17-year-old on the night they were dispatched to a disturbance call involving him.

A former member of the Hells Angels motorcycle gang was sentenced to two additional years in prison. **Stephane Faucher** had prison time added for contempt of court after he refused to honour an agreement to testify as a police informant. Faucher is serving 12 years for gangsterism, drug trafficking and conspiracy. Faucher was arrested during a massive roundup of Hells Angels and affiliated gangs in 2001. Within months, he decided to become a witness and agreed to testify against former colleagues. He later changed his mind, claiming police double-crossed him. In 2003 at one of the mega-trials against Hells Angels members, Faucher was sent a subpoena. He was held in contempt when he refused to testify.



Justice Minister **Gord Mackintosh** believes the province can come up with a plan that would allow municipalities to hire special constables to enforce traffic laws. The minister met in November with representatives of about a dozen municipalities and the RCMP. They want to develop a template that would detail the kind of training special constables would need and who they would be accountable to. Municipal leaders and the province have been at odds over the use of private policing services. Municipalities say they need special officers to keep speeders in check, particularly with an overtaxed RCMP. Mackintosh said the province wants to make sure any officer stopping a motorist is properly trained. He said that wasn't necessarily possible with municipalities relying on private companies.