



Crime in Rockland

by Joe Steinberger

Thanks to the reporting of Steve Betts in VillageSoup - worth subscribing to, by the way - "A Knox County grand jury issued indictments Nov. 3 — largely drug and assault charges — against 31 people in a two-day session held at the courthouse."

I looked through the list and counted 13 drug prosecutions, 7 prosecutions for domestic violence assault, 4 for other assaults, 3 for thefts, four miscellaneous. Looking through the list reminded me of my forty years of experience as a criminal defense lawyer. It made me sad.

What it brought up in me is the sad fact that our criminal justice system spends the greater part of its energy on punishing members of the lower classes. I know something about those people because most of my clients were "indigent." I was paid by the State to represent them. Since the Maine State Prison is in Knox County, many of my clients were already in prison and I visited them there. I can tell you first hand that we have very few upper class residents in the Maine State Prison.

This week's indictments remind me also of the oversized role that drug and domestic violence offenses play in our system. These two together make up two thirds of the indictments this week.

Drug addiction and domestic violence go together, of course. It is a huge problem. Are we taking the right approach to solving this problem? We are spending a huge amount of our taxes on police, courts, jails and prisons. Yet the problem is getting worse, not better. Is this not a valid reason for a rethink?

We can decriminalize drugs, which I favor, but we cannot decriminalize domestic assault. Violence against another must be a crime and must be prosecuted. If, however, despite vigorous prosecution and punishment, domestic violence is on the rise - which it seems to be - then perhaps we need to look at other solutions, not just criminal prosecution and sentences of imprisonment.

Those other solutions, both to drug addiction and to domestic violence, could perhaps be less expensive to the public, and more helpful to the people directly affected by drug addiction and family violence - which people, by the way, include a many of Rockland's children.

What might such solutions be? Your thought on the subject, and your conversations with others to broaden your perspective and theirs, could lead to constructive reform.

Subject to further reflection and conversation, I have three rough ideas to share.

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Down Main Street with Phil Groce Becoming

Ryan MacGlashing was born and raised in York. His dad was a mechanic and owned his own shop. When Ryan was 8 years old his mother went to work, and his dad, wanting more family-time, sold his shop and stayed at home to take care of the three kids, Ryan being the youngest. Ryan liked sports, especially baseball, and he can remember one time when he was found failing in a class, and he was grounded. He was prevented from hanging out with his friends. Ryan soon righted his ship, and he continued to study and do well, which continued all through high school where he was on the honor roll.

"My Dad wanted me to go to college and be so successful that I would NOT have to work on my own cars," Ryan declares. "But I still work on my car, in fact, I recently did a lot of work on it and saved over a thousand."

When Ryan started UM in Orono, his goal was to do well enough to get by, cruising subjects to see what he liked best. "I was complacent," he admits. "I looked into psychology, as I had an interest in the value of psychedelic drugs, and from that I drifted into art, then philosophy, but eventually graduated in marine sciences."

I wanted to know what he found out while he was in psychology. "This was in 2010, and research was just beginning in psychologic circles in the use of psilocybin. It sounded very valuable, and it still does, from what I have read. Being around it in college, so-to-speak, I tried it. After one set with it, it changed my entire life in a very positive way. Bang. Not that I am a crusader for anyone to try it, as the approach that psychology now uses is rather cautious. They are still figuring out doses, times, surroundings."

I wanted to know what the 'new' Ryan was like. "It accelerated my growth as a human, and at the time, I became more interested in life itself and exploring who I was rather than in ambition. I ended up in marine sciences, as I enjoyed the challenge of the science involved, but mostly because I loved the ocean. I wanted to learn more about it. I didn't want to find work in it.

"After graduation, I joined the Maine Conservation Corps, and I became a stone specialist, and a team leader. That took me into nature. Mostly I worked on the Appalachian Trail, though I also worked in various other public parks. After 4 years, I severely hurt my back moving a downed tree. The bottom line of it all was that I ended up with huge medical bills and still unable to work. I was very unhappy in how it all developed, and though I had a lawyer to help, I could get no recourse.

"I knew I wanted to help people, and I knew that I could relate to people in a very positive way--receiving great satisfaction in helping, as that was now my goal in life. I later got a job at Good Will, did some restaurant work, and then in 2018, I decided to take real estate classes.

"I found that pursuing real estate as a profession gave me a higher purpose, using many of my strengths. By the end of 2018 I had a license, and I joined the Bean Group. I am able to work from my apartment [just off North Main Street], and I connect by phone and computer. I am thrilled at being involved in such a major event in people's lives—buying a house. So many things need to be considered when buying a house, to design the purchase to fit the client's needs. I find I am very well fitted for this role.

"Sometimes life needs to kick you when you are down, and you need to suffer with few options with no safety net, similar to what so many other people have felt at some time, especially today. I appreciate life to a great degree, and I know that no one can help me but myself. I have become more aggressive in a positive sense in wanting to learn and be successful. Yes, successful.

"Poverty is a great stressor, and I was experiencing what others experience, which is earning just over poverty level, just enough to get by, but still being vulnerable to life's misfortunes. It's a set-up to not be happy. But I'm lucky, too, that I was able to go to college, and I had supportive parents.

"Real estate is a hot market now with Covid being the accelerator. I am working, like 80 hours a week, and I have only taken off 6 days since June. I am very present, yet I must look to the future. Since people can now work from home, we are getting people looking for summer places and also moving up here after retirement."

I said that it sounds like they're making Maine more the 'oldest' state. "Particularly in the mid coast," he replied, "we don't have the economy for lots of young newcomers. Professionals and skilled craftsmen can find work, and that does create further employment.

"I am disturbed to hear about newcomers being shunned by people already living here, thinking that new people are seeking the kind of life Mainers are already leading without paying their 'dues.' It's sad to think that if your new neighbor has a different colored license plate that it will affect your opinion of their character, value, and your level of trust. That's tribalism. We're better than that. Time to get over it, because we are facing change.

"I often ask Mainer's how long they've been in this state, how many generations? All of us are transplants unless you're a Native American. Where were prior generation living? Not here! Don't be afraid to risk what you are, because you are afraid of what you might become."



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One is drug legalization. Instead of a war on drugs, we need to make peace, and to use diplomacy rather than guns. This is being tried in Portugal now, with success. Having the resolve to overcome addiction depends on having hope for a successful and sober future. This hope is hard to have when a criminal conviction prevents you from finding respectable work. Hopelessness and despair are an engine not only of drug addiction, but also of family violence.

Another idea is free public clinics offering primary health care, drug and family counseling, opportunities for residential drug withdrawal programs, and also the drugs themselves. This last part we are doing already with Suboxone. Providing the drugs legally greatly reduces the cost to the addict - very important to addicts who are trying at the same time to help support a family, as many are - and it also (if it is not too restrictive) destroys the illegal drug business and all its violence.

Finally, we need to put a floor under all of us, a bottom above hunger and homelessness. This would give everyone the means to assert their independence from abusive relationships, and to participate confidently in our community. The means to this end is universal basic income, about which more another time.



Winter arrivesif only for a moment.

by Steve Carroll

Winter has arrived to the Mid-coast, but it was just a taste of what's to come. Much like election day, an omen of the future. Winter in Maine is blessed by some and feared by many, but come she will like it or not - most sturdy Mainers just grin and bear it. Children love the fun and frolic of those snowy days and parents cheerfully accept the "No School Days" as a brief pause in their hectic schedule. Our local ski area is packed with anxious skiers and the new local skating rink awaits those willing to give it a try.

Thought I would write this story as a diversion to the constant drum of political badgering and COVID-19 warnings. As we contemplate the first signs of the weather to come, it's nice to reflect on winters past and what lies ahead. Those retired folks can escape winter's embrace for at least a little while, yet most of us just attempt to embrace the season and find some pleasure in its arms. I love sipping a hot cup of coffee while relaxing by a cozy wood fire. Most Mainers will agree there's nothing better than a wood fire to warm you through and through. Bundle up in your Bean boots, scarf, hat and mitties and go for a walk on a snowy day. Many find satisfaction by taking part in the many outdoor sporting activities that abound in Maine. Snowmobiling, skiing, ice fishing and each February Camden's Great toboggan race. More and more people are enjoying the solitude of cross country skiing as new trails are created. Especially this year with the threat of the virus lingering many will find comfort in the great outdoors and attempt to avoid indoor gathering.

Bad winter, good winter, no matter what we get, it will all be over too soon and come early June we will all await the arrival of spring. Until then just get outside and take pleasure in all that the winter season has to offer, it's good for your health and your soul.

WEEK THIRTY-FOUR

COVID-19 RANDOM NOTES WHILE SHELTERING IN PLACE
by Phyllis Merriam

Awoke on the last day of October to find our first frost of the season. The Big Maple is now denuded of its crunchy brown leaves. Its skeletal branches trace lovely outlines against the blue-sky morning. It reminds me of drawings and paintings by Edward Gorey, Da Vinci, Mondrian, Van Gogh and Klimt, among others, that capture the bare beauty of silhouetted trees.

Covid-Halloween arrived with no tricker-treaters. But a neighbor's grandchildren did an outside Red Carpet event for us in their imaginative costumes and left us candy. Halloween also gave us the second full moon in a month - a "blue moon." Once in a blue moon: Let's hope that's true of covid and its viral cousins.

This weekend we will reset our clocks to "fall back" an hour. Flannel sheets and quilts provide cozy sleeping. Adjusting to time changes always throws me off.

We went back to the South Thomaston Post Office to see if we could feed the brown hen again. She wasn't there. Hoping she was safe, the timeworn riddles of "Why did the chicken cross the road?" popped into my head.

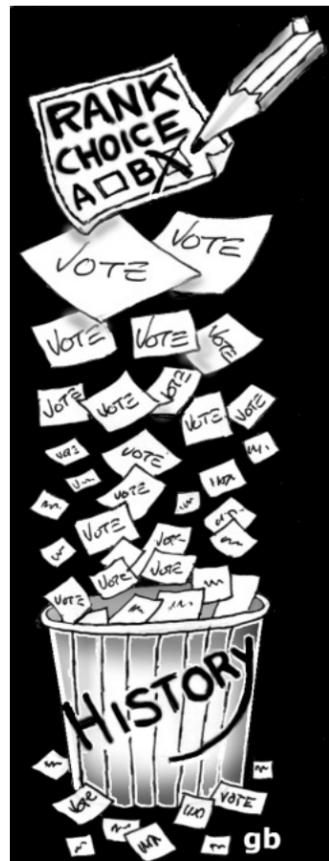
Overheard in my favorite store, "People who refuse to wear masks are covidiot!"

Paid the first half of our property taxes which were almost equal to the total taxes for 2019 -2020. As more moneyed covid refugees arrive and more natives die off or sell out, the newcomers will remain amazed at the mid-coast bargains. I wonder if their impulse buying will wear thin when they discover they miss all that urban centers have to offer and our Maine winter tests their Maine romance.

Election day arrived with an early overnight snowfall. I was reminded of the popular political insult "Snowflake." Voting around the country is higher than any in an American general election. Before the polls closed I saw a falling star said to be a sign of good luck or a bad omen - depending if one is a superstitious Democrat or Republican.

A friend donated her pecan pie to help me cope with election results anxiety.

Waiting for the election outcome is like waiting for the results of a biopsy.



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