

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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Thefts Should Be Worth The Effort Of Higher-Ups

"He said he was just so backed up with work he didn't have time to come down here."

That's what Shallotte Detective Cary Gaskins' was told by a Raleigh postal inspector when Gaskins inquired whether federal mail-tampering charges would be filed in connection with the theft of mail from Shallotte post office boxes.

It must be disheartening for police officers when they hear a line like that. They finally caught a suspect two weeks ago trying to cash a stolen check at the drive-in window of a local bank, when an alert teller gave police a license tag number, which led to the arrest.

One woman has been charged with seven counts of forgery and uttering; about \$2,500 worth of stolen checks were cashed. Police say there's a possibility charges also will be filed by the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department, Southport Police Department and New Hanover County authorities.

But it appears the stiffer federal charge of mail tampering won't be brought—not because there are no grounds, but because it's simply not worth the effort of postal inspectors in Raleigh.

If you think that discourages an officer of the law, how do you think Van Pyatte feels? Pyatte is a local businessman who had six checks, totaling \$5,000 to \$6,000, and other mail stolen from his box. The thief would deposit half the amount of a check into his business account and get the other half back as cash. As he put it, "We work on a budget. When you miss a couple checks it messes up your budget." (Not true if your budget is federal.)

Pyatte is understandably thankful for what the local cops have done to solve his problem, but a big one remains—the fact that it's still pretty easy to crack a post office box, take what you want and be relatively secure that if you keep your haul in the small thousands, the feds won't bother to come after you.

Mad Ruminations Of A Would-Be Tax Exile

April is the cruelest month,
 Sucking revenue out of the shallow pocket, provoking
 Rage and doom, insulting
 Numb brains with Form 1040.

Sorry if that made T.S. Eliot roll over in his grave, but I'm having an anguish-filled day this April 15, and I'm better at plagiarism than poetry.

Eliot did what I fantasize about every year at this time. He skipped the country. He went to England, but I know better. Taxes there are reportedly even more absurd than they are here.

What I had in mind was something a little closer to the equator. My husband favors fleeing to the wilds of western Puerto Rico. He goes there periodically and reports excellent surf and a laid-back populace happily on the dole, receiving American food stamps (with which folks buy everything from T-shirts to aged rum) and U.S.-government-subsidized health care. There aren't that many jobs, but who cares?

With what we paid in '93, he says, we could support ourselves in tropical comfort for half a decade. Heck, what we pay IS supporting a whole extended family there.

Know what I visualized last night as I girded my loins to go ask for a loan with which to pay our taxes? Pink tufted leather executive chairs. This was not an hallucination brought about by the mixture of deep-breathing exercises and Gallo beverages it took to keep me from screaming as I battled Form 1040.

I used to work for a private, nonprofit organization which operated on a little more than a million a year in federal funds. We did good work for poor people, largely because we were adept at getting federal grants.

We built a new building and filled it with state-of-the-art equipment and all new furnishings, including tufted leather desk chairs for our offices (mauve for the women, teal for the men).

We had a blast picking out wall coverings—grasscloth for the 20-by-40 conference room, tasteful patterns in vinyl for the other rooms. We put in a staff lounge and decorated it like a cafe, with a dozen tables for four, a side-by-side refrigerator freezer with ice dispenser in the door, a built-in microwave and a dishwasher.

We bought a pneumatic tube system for sending paperwork from the back of the building to the front desk—the same kind you put your deposit in at the bank's drive-up window.

We talked the honchos at an office furniture manufacturer into donating desks and oak lateral file cabinets for all the offices. We ordered our conference table custom made from a local craftsman.

It all seemed like a great thing to do at the time, to congratulate ourselves for writing good grants and to help poor people in surroundings that wouldn't make them feel like poor people.

A wave of nausea crept up on me last night as I pictured myself in that pink leather chair paid for by the hard-earned tax money of middle-class Americans, not impoverished, but many having to get thousand-dollar cash advances on the old Visa card before they mailed their tax returns to Memphis today.

Yep, now that I'm on the other side, I still want the good works to get done—but from quonset huts.

Hasta la vista, baby. We'll send postcards from Rico.

Lynn Carlson



Worth Repeating...

- The last temptation is the greatest treason:
 To do the right deed for the wrong reason. —T.S. Eliot
- America is a large, friendly dog in a very small room.
 Every time it wags its tail it knocks over a chair. —Arnold Toynbee

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Students, Supporters Respond To Band Letter

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following are excerpts from the many letters received in defense of the West Brunswick High School Band following publication of a letter March 7 criticizing its performance and funding.

I think that the band boosters have worked very hard to support athletics as well as the band. I would also like to say my fellow band members and I were deeply hurt by Mr. (Earl) Ellis's remarks, and we wonder why he felt it necessary to humiliate us. We would like for Mr. Ellis to come out and march a little while in our shoes.

Martin Callendar, Squad Leader, WBHS Band

I am reminded of how wonderful it is to have the constitutional right to freedom of speech and yet am deeply saddened to see it used with deliberate malice and to publicize inaccurate information.

The "Embarrassed By Band" letter is, however, an uninformed and vicious attack on another hardwork-

ing group of students as well as on their parents and on the band director, and is evidence that the writer knows very little about the band program and the people that are involved with it.

I have been closely associated with the band program and band booster association at WBHS for eight years and feel a great deal of pride for the way that they have represented their school and community.

Joan Morris Shallotte

I am now placing an invitation to Mr. Ellis. It would be our honor to have someone with such apparent musical talent and vast knowledge of how a band should be operated to come and help us further our education. Feel free to contact us any time.

Michael Didyoung Senior WBHS Band

Yes, we don't go to every away game, but we try to make it to at least two or three, but to get to these

games we have to have buses, and they were not available to us when we needed them. What really ticks me off is that (Mr. Ellis) had the audacity to say that the band members had a lack of support for the football team. Not only did we play our hearts out, we cheered and showed an overwhelming amount of enthusiasm at every game we played for.

Brian Chestnut Drum Major

Being a band member is a lot of hard work. It is very disappointing when you are marching in a parade in a wool uniform, carrying a heavy instrument, playing your music by memory, and no one is clapping for you. The same goes for when we are playing at a football game and the crowd seems more interested in a fight on the sidelines than recognizing all of our hard work on the field or in the stands.

Jamie N. Foss Senior Band Member

As president and acting officer on the executive council, on behalf of

the band, I feel it is my duty to respond. Well, the athletic department deserves a lot of recognition and respect, but the band deserves just as much, if not more. We are there for the players every chance we get—home and away, providing buses are available. So if you would like to see us at more away games, help us get buses, and we will be there.

Rebecca McKeithan, Band President, WBHS Senior

Write Us

We welcome your letters to the editor. Letters must include your address and telephone number. (This information is for verification purposes only; we will not publish your street/mailling address or phone number.) Letters must be typed or written legibly. Address letters to:
 The Brunswick Beacon
 P.O. Box 2558
 Shallotte NC 28459
 Anonymous letters will not be published.

No More Rambling In McMilly Swamp

Growing up just south of Shallotte I was always aware of the critters in the woods around our home on McMilly Swamp, and keenly respectful.

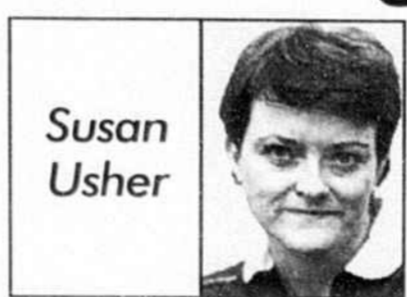
Most of the time they kept their distance, perhaps because of my dad's passel of hunting dogs and an ornery yard dog whose name I never knew how to spell. She was black, scrawny-boned, mean, and without question my daddy's companion. We called her "You Know," but it could have been spelled "Yuno." I don't know.

Every summer she was bitten by at least one poisonous snake, sometimes more. She always survived, meaner than ever. Daddy had her put away at age 16, so that I could have a puppy of my own.

When You Know was alive, though, we'd hear a special bark and know she had something cornered—a water moccasin or any one of several types of rattlesnakes most likely, but an occasional coral snake or red-bellied swamp snake also wandered up on occasion. Snakes were about the only critters that didn't know it was safer in the swamp. To this day I don't ken what drew them up the hill.

Being allowed to play in the swamp and in the woods is an experience I'm grateful for to this day, even though I bear a few scars well-bred little girls weren't supposed to get.

I'm all the more grateful because I realize now Mama must have let us go in spite of all the fears that come naturally to mothers. Perhaps it was because she remembered the pleasures of her own rambling as a child growing up on Midway Road and



Susan Usher

playing on Half Hell Swamp.

Alone with a dog, or together, we girls had the freedom to ramble through thickets of mixed hardwoods, pines and brambles, swing-

ing on thick vines, sitting beneath huge old trees on naturally soft beds of moss and leaves, occasionally climbing out on a limb to pluck a sprig of mistletoe. Occasionally misstepping and tripping into shallow, slow-moving water the color of strong tea or into oozy, black muck that smelled not just old, but ancient.

With the boys who lived in our neighborhood we dangled fishing lines with bones over the side of the bridge, collected creek mussels from the sandbar, followed raccoon tracks and watched the occasional otter at play.

We brought home buckets of briarberries to cook with dumplings, bouquets of wild azalea, an occasional baby rabbit or bird, and tales of close encounters with stinkbugs, spiders and snakes. Old hornet's nests, pockets full of crushed aromatic wild ginger, thorn-scratched legs and red bug bites were routine.

One price we pay for growing up is fear. I don't ramble through woods alone any more. If we had children, I'm not sure they would ramble either. The world is a different place and I'm not the woman my mother was.



We've Got To Do Something, Don't We?

Remember that scene in "Rebel Without a Cause" where a troubled teenager, played by James Dean, is standing on the edge of a high cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean?

His name is Jim and he's the new kid in town. He is inspecting the finish line for a "chicken run" against Buzz, the popular leader of a local gang. Earlier that day, the two youths got into a sparring match that ended with a challenge to meet at this spot.

So tonight a large crowd has assembled to watch the young men race a pair of jalopies side-by-side toward the cliff's edge. The first one to bail out will forever be known as a "chicken."

In a classic film moment, the two stand alone together on the precipice. The crashing waves drown out the goading of the noisy assemblage. Momentarily free of his usual audience, Buzz admits that, in spite of all the posturing, he really likes Jim and could imagine the two of them being friends.

"So why do we do this?" Jim asks.

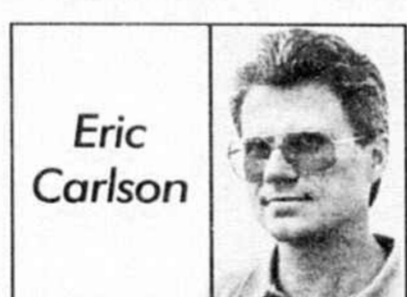
"We've got to do something," Buzz replies moments before plummeting to his death.

"Don't we?"

That haunting question came to mind as I heard the news about Kurt Cobain, the gravel-voiced lead singer and song writer for the "grunge rock" band Nirvana, who recently put a shotgun to his head and pulled the trigger.

His tragic, pointless death gives today's teenagers their first hero casualty on the one-way street of suicidal self-indulgence. Welcome to the club.

Hank Williams. Ernest Hemingway. Marilyn Monroe. Elvis Presley. Jimi Hendrix. Janis Joplin. Brian Jones. Jim Morrison. Sid Vicious. John Belushi. River Phoenix. And so on goes the roster of artist celebrities who were consumed by



Eric Carlson

their own fame and sought relief in drugs and/or firearms.

Fortunately, there is an even longer list of lucky ones who tried the same self-destructive solutions to the same self-inflicted problems and somehow stumbled back from the brink.

It's too bad Cobain wasn't one of the latter group. He was a gifted writer of haunting melodies and sparse, cutting lyrics about the confusion and disillusionment each new generation of teenagers passionately believes itself to be the first to experience.

Nirvana was among the originators of the "grunge" movement that re-ordered teenage fashions (with a return to long hair, torn jeans and flannel shirts) and spawned other top groups like Pearl Jam, Soundgarden, Alice in Chains and Stone Temple Pilots.

Nirvana's first major album "Nevermind" sold nearly 10 million copies worldwide. On the group's blockbuster single "Smells Like Teen Spirit," Cobain wailed a plaintive lament that captured the bitterness and confusion of his generation:

"I feel stupid and contagious. Here we are now, entertain us."

It was a cry heard loud and clear by young people growing up in an age of diminished expectations; when the promise of the American Dream has begun to sound hollow; when divorces are more common than healthy marriages; when kids learn their moral values from televi-

sion instead of parents, teachers and the church.

Unfortunately for Cobain and so many others before him, he got captured in the web of his own legend and wound up painting himself into a corner.

He had become rich and famous by singing about being deprived and unloved. Then, unable to enjoy his success and pass on a message of hope, he tried to hide and remain the tragic outlaw his fans wanted him to be.

Cobain's opening words on Nirvana's 1993 album "In Utero" told the story: "Teenage angst has paid off well. Now I'm old and bored."

The last song the group recorded, "I Hate Myself and I Want to Die," left little doubt about the depths of Cobain's depression. In March he put himself into a coma with mass quantities of champagne and pain killers.

Yet his so-called friends and handlers ignored the obvious warning signs and insisted the overdose was accidental. A few weeks later, his death left little doubt that it wasn't.

That was as far as I got Friday afternoon with this column when the call came over the police scanner: A fatal shooting.

Driving to the scene, I assumed it would be a murder, probably the result of some domestic dispute or a drug deal gone sour. But it didn't look that way as I parked in front of the house.

A detective told me that a teenager had shot herself. "A real pretty girl," he said in that dull, emotionless voice cops use when they have to deal with tragedy.

No sound on earth cuts into your psyche like the heart-wrenching wail of a woman grieving over a loved-one's death. It poured off the front porch like a swollen river of tears.

I will always remember that cry.

And the sight of a deputy trying to comfort a young child. And the flashes of light on a lowered window shade as investigators photographed the scene inside.

Her death probably had nothing to do with Kurt Cobain's. But as I drove home, the terrible coincidence made me numb. I had planned to use his suicide in a message to teenagers and the adults around them. Now I don't know what to say.

Cobain had problems. Everybody does. But he let his problems fester and grow all out of proportion until he felt surrounded and trapped. Until he mistakenly believed there was only one way out.

Unfortunately, the warning signals he gave off fit all too well into his media image as the "voice of a troubled generation." So nobody stopped him.

Just as unfortunate for those of us who have teenagers in our homes, and I do, is the fact that they often give us mixed signals—sad one minute, laughing the next, then having nothing to say about anything. No matter how much we love them, they rarely share with us what's really going on in their deepest thoughts.

When the unspeakable happens to one of their peers, all we can do is comfort our own and grieve for the grieving, though somehow it doesn't seem like enough.

People don't commit suicide because they want to die, but because they hurt and they want to stop hurting. They forget the other ways to deal with pain.

People in pain need to know that they are not alone—that family, friends, teachers, counselors, doctors, law enforcement agencies and religious leaders can help.

The rest of us need to be watchful to try and recognize the warning signs that a friend or loved one is standing on that cliff and asking:

"We've got to do something. Don't we?"