

# Crime Doesn't Pay—Victims Do

BY MARGARET PERSON CURRIN  
 United States Attorney  
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 Victim/Witness Coordinator

There is nothing in your life—short of war, famine, or pestilence—that can prepare you to be a victim of violent crime. To be dragged from your car on your way home from work and mugged or beaten. To be raped in your own apartment in the middle of the night. To have your daughter murdered or sexually abused in her college dorm room on her first venture away from home. In our hearts, victims of violent crimes hold a special, tender place, because we know that their pain might well be ours.

But there is no tender place in our criminal justice system for victims. Even the name implies it: justice is for the criminals, not victims.

While criminals are surrounded by a blockade of legal and constitutional rights, victims are left out in the cold. Only a few states offer constitutional guarantees to victims. The rest offer various "Victims' Bills of Rights," with the provision that the rights named are suggestions only. If they are ignored by the authorities in a particular case, victims have no recourse.

Most Americans are unaware of the pain of victims, for a variety of reasons. Movies and television show a system of police officers, prosecutors, and judges who are fighting for the victim. Their job is to get the criminal and put him away—all within 60 minutes.

In reality, it doesn't work that way. A victim may suffer a complete physical, emotional, and financial breakdown from his or her experience, while the attacker is out on the streets again in a matter of hours, days, or months.

Part of the reason for this is that in the American system of criminal justice, a violent crime is held to be a crime against society. The officials of the law, from the first police officer on the scene, to the judge and jury, to the prison guard who finally releases the offender, are all agents of our injured society.

This is not an isolated problem. North Carolina's crime rate has increased 12%, triple the national crime rate increase of 3%. Our state has risen from 40th in 1985 to 28th in the 1989 national average crime increase. Many Carolinians will be touched directly; others will be vicariously affected. Economically, not one of us will escape the effect of crime and violence in our state.

When it happens, how they will be treated? One woman, a rape victim, was kept in a hospital emergency room until the early morning and subjected to the necessary (but painful and humiliating) examinations. All her belongings, including her clothes and her purse (with her wallet in it) were taken from her to be held as evidence. When it was over, she found herself standing on a street corner in a paper dress, without money or keys to her apartment, and with no way to get to her

home across town.

Victims have needs—real needs—that must be met. To be denied even minimal involvement in "their case" is painful to them. Yet often they are barred from the courtroom by officials who feel that their presence might have an adverse effect on the rights of the criminal.

Ten years ago, there were seldom victims in our courts. Today, the situation for victims is looking better. Today, there are judges, prosecutors, law enforcement officials, and various service providers working with victims' rights groups to give victims a voice in our legal system, and to create avenues for compensation.

California, Rhode Island, Florida, Michigan, Texas, and Washington all provide constitutional protections to victims. Forty-six states have victim compensation funds; in North Carolina our Department of Crime Control and Public Safety administers the Crime Victims Compensation Commission funds. Both Republicans and Democrats make victims' rights part of their election year platforms. President Bush has made the issue an integral part of his agenda. Victims and their advocates across the country have organized a grassroots movement that has gained the attention and support of lawmakers and judges. It's a movement that is having a powerful effect on the way we approach the question of criminal justice.

Across North Carolina, organizations including the

North Carolina Victim Assistance Network, North Carolina Justice Academy, North Carolina Council on the Status of Women, North Carolina Department of Crime Control and Public Safety, and the Victim-Witness Subcommittee of our Law Enforcement Coordinating

Committee have organized together into a powerful coalition to address this problem and to draw attention to the plight of victims. Many working on this issue are victims themselves. Others are important members of the legal system. All of us are partners for justice in a fight for victory over violence. We have performed miracles in the last few years by helping to initiate needed reforms. We have often been the only ones who stood between a victim and total despair. We have put their time, effort, and money on the line for a cause. And we have made a difference.

This week is National Crime Victims' Rights Week. All across our nation, from the Rose Garden at the White House to our own community watches and city halls, communities are taking a stand for victims' rights. And that's as it should be. We owe victims our support and respect.

George Santayana once said that one of the greatest crimes of all is to stand silent in the face of wrongdoing. The way we treat victims is a crime. It's a system we created, and it's a system we can change. The price of crime is too high and, so far, it's the victims who have paid the bill.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Future Is Dependent On Educational Opportunity

To the editor:  
 What will determine the quality of life in the twenty-first century? What has made Raleigh and Charlotte prosperous in recent years? What can we do to build a bright economic future for our region of the state?

Rural Eastern North Carolina has historically relied on agriculture and manufacturing industry for economic strength. However, increased technology and offshore competition have recently combined to endanger both segments of the economy. During this time, the service sector flourished in Raleigh and Charlotte, linking the cities to high technology and better jobs.

Eastern North Carolina, however, has not received the support necessary for it to experience similar growth. For example, interstate transportation linking Eastern North Carolina to the Piedmont is not yet completed, but tax dollars have paid for sufficient transportation in the Triangle. Further, North Carolina's two major airports serve the Piedmont region of the state. Our two largest state universities are also located in the Triangle, where State tax dollars support the Raleigh-Durham area. It is no wonder that major high-tech firms often choose to locate there.

These changes have had a strong economic effect on Brunswick County. For example, the average Brunswick County resident will

earn about \$10,000 in 1990. That figure is 46% higher in Wake County, where a supplement of \$1634 per child was added to state funds in the 1988-89 school year; Brunswick contributed an additional \$761 per child. A typical Wake County classroom had about \$22,000 more to spend than one in Brunswick County. Thus, the economic success of the Triangle has resulted in greater funding for its schools.

The State of North Carolina has traditionally supported public education. Unfortunately, the present system of public funding provides only for a minimal level of quality. Local systems must raise their own supplemental funds if they desire the best quality of education available for their children. Rural eastern counties, whose citizens supported the economic development and institutions of the Piedmont, have not been able to match funds with urban counties. Urban teachers earn higher salaries, and funds for textbooks, equipment, and other supplies are much more plentiful. A high-tech education for the future requires more expensive microscopes and computers; the need for additional funds will only become more critical in the 1990s.

A strong economic future is dependent on educational opportunity. What must be done? The State of North Carolina should begin to fund a superior system of education for her children, not a marginal one that requires additional local funding in

order to meet quality standards. If local systems desire additional funding for their schools, they should have the right to supplement state monies, but such funds should not be necessary just to meet basic standards of excellence. Our economic future depends on a stronger state commitment to education.

John A. Parnell  
 Pembroke

(The writer is on the business faculty at Pembroke State University.)

### Incompetence If Not Crime

To the editor:  
 In the April 19 edition, you report that last Wednesday, the Brunswick County Commissioners, voted to raze the Red & White building in Bolivia which they purchased for \$75,000 only two years ago. This with an estimated cost of \$28,000 to demolish the building plus any legal fees paid on purchase to county attorneys amount to well over \$100,000 for an empty lot in a poor location.

The North Carolina Department of Investigation should be called in to determine whether the board of two years ago was duped into authorizing the purchase of what was surely a decrepit building. If no crime was committed, incompetence certainly prevailed.

Arthur Ross  
 Calabash

### Fishing's Back By Popular Demand

The weekly fishing report is back. Can you believe it?

It's been about four months since I wrote the last fishing report of the 1989 season. Time sure flies.

Most local fishing experts will tell you fishing was pretty pathetic last year, especially after Hurricane Hugo came through and ripped up the fishing piers, ruined the fall spot season and stirred up the king mackerel waiting offshore.

But let's not dwell on the past. This is 1990 and from the way things have gone so far, it may actually be a good fishing year.

I hope so. There's enough problems to deal with in Brunswick County without the fishing going sour.

You know, I used to hate writing the fishing report when I first started working at The Beacon. I didn't know the first thing about fishing, and worse than that, I didn't care.

I'm not Bill Dance, but in two-and-a-half years of training I've learned the difference between croaker and whiting and Spanish mackerel and Spanish moss.

Calling for reports from the local fishing holes is a good way to start each Monday morning. The people are nice to work with, and they're not likely to sue the newspaper.

What bothers me, though, is that



Doug Rutter

I haven't caught a single fish since moving to Brunswick County three years ago.

I've seen thousands of fish while walking up and down the fishing piers and covering the various tournaments each year. Heck, I've seen two-year-old children catching fish. I'm in a horrible slump.

To be honest, I never have been much of a fisherman. As a youngster, I always hated baiting the hook unless we were using dough balls or something artificial. I just didn't enjoy sticking a metal hook into the side of a worm and getting worm guts all over my hands.

The whole concept of fishing, waiting for a fish to bite a hook hidden behind a treat, never really did anything for me.

But now that I'm a bit older and not quite as energetic as I used to be, fishing's not such a bad way to pass the time.

I've been fishing a few times since moving to North Carolina. My former roommate, Mark, and I went surf fishing a couple times. But we never caught anything.

Since moving into a canal house at Holden Beach, I've taken more of an interest in fishing. The canal is right outside my back door, so it's real convenient.

I've borrowed a couple of fishing rods from my father and have tried my luck several times, but haven't had a bite. I know there's fish in the canal because I've seen them jumping out of the water.

Writing the fishing report each week, I hear just about every excuse in the book—and some that aren't in the book—when the fishing is lousy. It's either too hot, too cold, too windy, too early in the season, too late in the season...you name it, I've heard it.

I'm not going to blame my lack of success on the weather.

Personally, I think the fish just don't like my brand of bait. Most small fish like blood worms, shrimp or cut mullet. So far, they haven't gone for my cheese-filled hot dogs.

I'm not worried, though. It took me a while to get used to cheese-filled hot dogs too.



PHOTO BY BILL FAVER

WILD SUMAC can be used for plantings around the home.

### Sumacs For Our Yards

BY BILL FAVER

Not many of us think about using some of the sumacs as plantings in our yards. We may admire them along the roadsides and hedgerows, but we forget they could also be useful as hedges and as landscape plants.

Staghorn sumac grows wild in the southeastern states. It usually requires well-drained soil in full sun. Plants seem to invade areas where vegetation has been disturbed. Often found in large thickets, sumac has almost a tropical look with the compound leaves sometimes as large as two feet long. Staghorn sumac can grow to a height of 25-30 feet if conditions are favorable.

Summer flowers are greenish-yellow in clusters 6-8 inches long and are often overlooked. Plants become almost spectacular in autumn when the foliage turns deep red and then bright scarlet before falling. After the leaves drop off, the fruiting clusters add color and abundant food for birds. The fuzzy end branches of staghorn sumac on male plants look like velvety antlers in winter and give the name to this shrub.

Sumacs can be transplanted from the wild with reasonable success. It is best to transplant when leaves fall in autumn or in early spring and to dig out small shoots with as many roots as possible. They should be planted where they can be watered thoroughly. When plants become established, expect them to grow quickly and to develop into a mass of beautiful shrubbery with landscape interest for most of the year.



FAVER

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|--|--|
- \*\*\*\*\*  
 Democrat, District Native, Family Man, Hard Working, Fair to All  
 ★16 years experience in the Judicial System ★Resident of Brunswick County  
 ★Born and raised in Columbus County



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