

Julie's get so far out of hand, I think of Mrs. Barnard. A widow in her 70s, Mrs. Barnard visits our greenhouse about twice a week all season long. She buys a lot of plants, but we really appreciate her visits because she truly loves flowers. Having your own business is fun, and a challenge, but the true reward is in producing something that brings joy to other people.

And the next time Julie and I are gone overnight, we're going to program George Gilder's phone number into our alarm system.

Blake Hurst writes frequently for The American Enterprise from Tarkio, Missouri.

ON THE TRAIL OF "SOME DUDE"

by Gaye Wagner

In all the thick dissertations analyzing criminal behavior, nowhere will you find mention of the specter named "Some Dude," or the faulty brain switch in regular citizens that turns off common sense in the pursuit of a "good deal." But I can tell you these two factors cause problems for us police officers nearly every day.

When I was a tyke, I had an imaginary bunny as a companion. This bunny was also, I tried to explain to my mom, the true wrongdoer when she mistakenly blamed me for the broken china cup, the crayon on the wall, and the grape juice on the white table cloth. I gave up my imaginary friend at about age four.

For many people who break the law, though, destructive imaginary friends never quite go away. On inner-city streets, these elusive bad guys are known as "Some Dude." Some Dude has been fingered in my presence for stealing, selling drugs, and hawking hot goods. There's something about sitting in the back seat of a police car wearing locked bracelets that brings hazy recollections of Some Dude to life. And Some Dude is one tenacious opponent in the war on crime, as these slices of interviews indicate:

"Where did you get the car?"

"I got it from Some Dude. I bought it for \$5. I ran into him when I got off the trolley. We started talking. He said, 'Check out this car I have. Want to buy it?' He said

it would be \$15. I said \$5 was all I had, so he said, 'Take it for \$5.'"

"You bought a late model Mazda RX-7 for \$5 and you're telling me you didn't know it was stolen?"

"...Once I got in the car and seen everything...it didn't have an ignition. I said, 'Yea, it's stolen,' but I already paid the \$5, so...and I didn't steal the car."

Oh. And Some Dude also does dastardly drug deeds:

"Did you know this is crystal methamphetamine on your front seat?"

"I knew. I know Some Dude who uses it. When I saw him with it, I told him to put it in my blue pouch, and I gave him a

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job etiquette lecture, because I don't want that stuff on my job sites. I told him if I ever saw it again, I'd fire him. I don't know why he left it there. I didn't even notice it was still on my seat."

"Who is this dude?"

"He works for me, but I just met him. I don't know his full name."

"Where is he now?"

"I don't know."

Here's another:

"What's this in your pocket?"

"It looks like a piece of rock (cocaine), but I couldn't be sure, ma'am. These aren't my pants."

"You're wearing them. Whose pants are they?"

"They're Some Dude's. We're the same size. I just grabbed his pants by mistake, I guess."

OK. And, finally:

"What are you doing with PCP?"

"It's not mine. Some Dude left it in the

park. I just picked it up and took it. I'm just holding it for him. I didn't want somebody to pick it up and not know what it was."

"Who is this dude, and where can I find him?"

"I don't know his name or where he lives. He's just a dude I know."

Right.

If you're thinking I'm absurdly bad at writing believable dialogue tidbits, lose heart. The above all come from real interviews with real adults.

Most times, the "Some Dude" alibi makes me chuckle. Until the defense attorney launches it when I'm in court. Because now and again, Some Dude casts a shadow of doubt that actually allows the storyteller to go free.

And it's not only chronic law dodgers who turn their consciences off when the planets of good deal and easy opportunity align. There are ready buyers from all walks of life for car stereos hawked at a pittance in the beach parking lot. Yeah, \$25 seemed a little low for a \$350 leaf blower, but, hey, you never know why people are getting rid of stuff at a swap meet. And the door-to-door hustler with the cheap electronics equipment comes in very handy when you want to buy something for the kids. When one of us inquiring police officers asks these cost-conscious buyers where they got their great deal, it's usually a contrite voice that answers, "From Some Dude at..."

The biggest challenge of everyday crime fighting isn't dodging bullets, though that's a risk for sure. It's the bit-by-bit information gathering that eventually convinces people that Some Dude is a ghost, and one who will haunt anyone willing to believe themselves and summon his presence.

Gaye Wagner, a frequent contributor to The American Enterprise, is a San Diego police officer.

WRITING OFF MY FAMILY

By Susan Olasky

When I married 19 years ago I planned to be a professional of some sort. Shortly after our wedding, however, I became pregnant, and before our first anniversary we were parents. I found I liked motherhood,

but this was the mid-1970s and it seemed that very few college-educated women my age (23) were home with their kids. I felt pressure to go out and be somebody.

So I got a job. But after six months of work, we analyzed our finances and discovered that I was making about 15 cents an hour after paying for child care and transportation—and we were not very happy. Quitting the job solved those problems, but I still wanted to labor. So I went back to school and came out with a graduate degree and baby number two.

That's when I made the discovery that changed my life. Being at home was liberating. It was fun. It allowed me time to learn to do different things.

Over the next few years I helped start a local crisis pregnancy center and began homeschooling one son. We had our third baby. And I began to write. My first attempts were pitiful, but I gradually learned the discipline and the craft.

The most important thing I had to learn, though, was that life is long, and that it's not necessary to accomplish everything at once. My husband Marvin once met a Harvard professor who pointed proudly to a shelf of books he had written, explaining he had no children. He couldn't do both, he said. Each potential child would have cost him a book, he estimated, and he preferred the books. I prefer my family.

And I'm convinced that it's because of my family that I'm able to write. I've received encouragement and learned technical things from my husband, who edits a magazine. And I've learned human things from my children. That's why I take the travails that come from writing at home with a shrug. It isn't always easy, but what's the alternative?

I write mostly on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, because that's when I take my four-year-old to Mother's Day Out. Marvin and I sometimes try to write while Ben is occupied at home, but that can be frustrating. Last spring while he was supposedly being pacified by Pinocchio, Ben decided he needed to kill the whale by urinating at

the screen. The result: a shorted-out TV.

My writing ranges from columns for *World* to children's books. Some days the words come fast, other days I fritter away time and keep checking my watch to see if it's time for lunch yet. To an outside observer my life probably seems chaotic. But it works for me.

In particular, I think homemaking and writing are complementary. Housework and childrearing are never finished, and it's sometimes hard to see

AFTER SIX MONTHS OF WORK,
WE DISCOVERED THAT I WAS
MAKING ABOUT 15 CENTS AN
HOUR AFTER PAYING FOR
CHILD CARE AND TRANS-
PORTATION—AND WE WERE
NOT VERY HAPPY.

progress. Not so with writing. Each book or article has a beginning and an end. Things get published; I don't have to revisit the same topic over and over again.

At the same time, writing carries hazards that my family work counteracts. When I write my stories I have a sense of Susie in charge of the universe. If there is a character I don't like, I wipe him out. If my heroine has a besetting sin, I write it away. I bend and shape my characters until they conform to my requirements. That's fun, but that's fiction. In real life we must muddle along, and take the needs of others into account as well as our own. My time caring for my family helps me understand and accept this. It reminds me that I'm not in charge, God is—and He knows what He's doing. That is a critical life's lesson we've tried to teach our children. And it's one I'm glad to regularly re-learn myself.

Susan Olasky lives and labors in Austin, Texas.

EMPLOYER TO SCHOOLS: YOU FLUNK

by Doug Glant

To an inveterate do-gooder and committed Rotarian (Seattle #4), this sounded like the perfect combination of civic activism and good business. Our Rotary club was sponsoring a youth corps, primarily to benefit minorities, by assisting them in getting that first entry-level job. I signed up post haste.

Our first young man showed up for a \$7.50 an hour (plus medical benefits) job in our recycling plant. He had a proclivity for being late to work, but we assumed we could ease him into punctuality and so began the training process—which included learning to operate a forklift. As he had gone through 11th grade, we assumed he could read English. Wrong. So our training was done in a Homeric oral fashion. We stressed repeatedly that safety was crucial, especially when operating machinery. This message was shaken off like a bad pitch, as he preferred playing bumper car to hauling metal. After two minor scrapes and one expensive fence knockdown we reluctantly concluded that this was not going to work. Our parting seemed pleasant enough, until we received some much less friendly communication from the local Equal Opportunity Board. We were eventually exonerated, but only several months and several thousand dollars later.

I'm a stubborn guy, though, so I decided to try another lad. Though this one was a graduate of one of Seattle's finest public high schools, he couldn't even begin to read or fill out the job application form. We coached him through the process with teeth-grinding tedium. On the job, he lasted 6 hours, remarking to the superintendent on his way out the door that working in a scrapyard was hard, much too hard to be paid a measly \$7.50 an hour (this in 1975).

But, Cervantes-style, I once more surged into the battle. By now the friendly folks at the Rotary Job Office recognized my voice. And this time they said they had just the guy for us.