

A couple of years ago, one of my close relatives called to inform me that the police were clearly asleep at the wheel because his car had been stolen the night before. (He shall remain nameless as long as he returns my lawn mower by Saturday!) He's a very funny guy, so I thought that, once again, he was kidding around. After all, who in the world would steal a 12-year-old Toyota with 250,000 miles and a paint job to match?

It soon became apparent that he wasn't kidding. However, having once been a detective I knew there just had to be more to this story. Accordingly, Inspector Bueermann began grilling the "victim." I soon learned that not only had he left his car unlocked and its anti-theft device ("The Club") unattached and lying on the floorboard, he had also left the car's keys in the ignition! After some good-natured kidding, I expressed my sympathy and we discussed the nature of auto theft and the odds that his car would be recovered.

A few weeks later I took another call from this erstwhile victim who reported that his car had been recovered by the San Bernardino Police Department. I expressed my happiness that it had been recovered and was surprised that he didn't seem very pleased. He then pointed out that when the police found his car there were two transients who apparently had been living in it since the theft. As the original owner of the car, he didn't really appreciate sharing his vehicular pride and joy with a couple of homeless guys who had thoroughly trashed it!

I relate this story not to embarrass my relative, but rather to point out how citizens can help prevent crime by taking a few simple steps. While crime control is the governmental province of the police, we can't stop crime without the community's help.

My friends in the fire service use a concept called the "fire triangle" to describe the elements necessary for a fire to start. If you remove any part of the triangle – heat, oxygen or fuel – a fire can't start or maintain itself. Similarly, the "crime triangle" describes the three components of a crime. Remove either the victim, the offender or the opportunity from the situation and voila' – no crime.

Since my relative couldn't remove the offender from this situation, nor could he disappear from his home, removing the "opportunity" from the equation would have been his best bet. Of course, that would have required he use the anti-theft device, lock his car and refrain from leaving the keys in the car. Simply things. Big impact on crime.

During the last month we have been experiencing a significant increase in auto theft and thefts from vehicles. Regardless of how many thieves we catch, there seems to be a never-ending parade of lawbreakers. We are continuing to try and suppress these crimes but the ease with which thieves steal or break into cars is amazing. It literally takes about 20 seconds for them to steal your car and less than that to break in and take items from inside.

The holiday shopping season is upon us. The RPD will dramatically increase its presence in the business areas of town until after New Year, however we need the community's help to prevent crime. Simple things you can do to prevent your victimization are: get an anti-theft device like The Club; lock your car: take your keys out of the car when you park it; do not leave items such as a purse, camera, CD player, etc. in plain sight; lock these items in the trunk; and, finally, pay attention to your surroundings. If you see anything or anyone suspicious please call the police immediately.

If you have any comments or concerns please feel free to contact me at 909-798-7661 or via e-mail at chief@redlandspolice.org or the new downtown/business liaison officers, Ric Rincon, Jacinto DeLeon and Eddie Herrera at 909-798-7610 or email them at businessliaison@redlandspolice.org.