

Fire at the Cheyenne Club (continued from page 9)

I stayed parked at the curb for a couple minutes, then drove down Capital. The two police cars and Channel 5 reporter Jaclyn Rostie were still there.

I traveled west on 15th to Thomes and made my way back up to 17th Street so I could drive by the alley behind the Cheyenne Club.

I saw no activity in front of or in the alley behind the Cheyenne Club. I couldn't even be certain the Club was open but the neon signs in the windows were lit so I assume it was. I circled around the Cheyenne Club building (I didn't drive into the alley - I don't know if it's a deadend or if there's another way out of it, but I didn't try) again, then went back Central and over the viaduct to the southside.

Because I get an occasional anonymous call having to do with odd claims, I filed this one in my memory bank. First, I wrote down the telephone no. that came up on the caller ID of my phone. I wanted a record of the no. just in case the memory was erased - deliberately or unintentionally by lightning.

I made a point of listening to some local radio news on Friday morning and read the other newspaper. I heard and saw nothing about any kind of fire downtown.

Then, in Saturday's daily newspaper, there was mention of five dumpster fires in the downtown area, including two behind the Cheyenne Club.

I considered my responsibilities. I often have to promise confidentiality to sources and I would never betray that commitment.

This caller never sought that protection and I wouldn't have agreed to it if he had because the suggestion in his words was that he knew something about an illegal act and might have committed it.

There is an even stronger suggestion that he may have been the one starting a fire.

I repeated the words he used that night several times to myself - later that night and the next day - and think I can recall them fairly accurately, although not verbatim. Again:

Caller: **I want to report a fire at the Cheyenne Club.**

Me: **Who are you looking for? Why are you telling me?**

Caller: **I want to tell the Herald that these places downtown aren't safe and secure for employees.**

He hung up as I was starting to say something else. I think I started to tell him to call the fire department but I can't be sure.

Jump ahead to Saturday, September 30. It being a wrap-up weekend for me with the paper that you have in your hands, I had a lot to do and little time to do it.

But after I read the brief accounting in the WT-E about multiple dumpster fires downtown Thursday night between 9:45 and 11:45, I knew I had to do the right thing - whatever that might turn out to be. I sought legal advice about my responsibility to report the contact.

Around the other things I had to do on that Saturday, I concluded that I had to let someone in law enforcement or arson investigation know what had happened. I first called Danny Glick and left a message for him to call me. Before he could, I contacted the person I knew was the arson investigator for the Cheyenne Fire Department.

I provided him the information about the call and the cell phone no. of the caller who had contacted me the same night as the five dumpster fires were started.

Some people still don't realize that almost everyone has caller ID these days. It is not the first time that a caller to the Cheyenne Herald was shocked by a return call when he hadn't left a number. Oh, well.

How do we protect our schools?

Six girls taken hostage in a small Colorado school. One killed and probably all traumatized. Other students were released at the beginning, four girls during the siege. Apparently, the middle-aged pervert entered the school and classroom unchallenged.

A principal killed in a small Wisconsin school, near Madison. A custodian, other students and teachers wrestled with the 15 year old who entered the school armed with a rifle and a handgun. He got past them and was confronted by the principal who was shot and killed.

Both of these incidents in isolated and small schools were tragic. Could either or both of them been avoided? How? Could they both have been prevented? How?

One striking difference in the two events is that, to this time, there has been no mention of an adult being involved in the Bailey, Colorado hostage-taking. There has been no mention if there was a teacher in the classroom where the teenage girls were held against their will. There has been no mention if there was an adult in the hallway leading into the school or whether any adult - teacher, custodian, principal, counselor, superintendent, etc. - tried to intervene. There has been no mention if an adult, or adults, was in the classroom when the depraved intruder began to release those students who did not meet his physical appearances.

In Wisconsin, a 15 year-old who fit the appearance of a student but was armed, was confronted and fought.

In Colorado, a 55 year-old misfit who fit only the description of a pervert intruding into a child's environment, made his way into a classroom to do his damage unchallenged.

Where were the teachers? Where were the protectors of these children? Why did no one come to their rescue before a SWAT team blew out a wall and attempted a rescue?

In Wisconsin, there were real efforts to help. In Colorado, a male classmate first told the story that he had initially balked at leaving the girl's behind only to later confess that he wasn't even in that classroom when the incident occurred.

In other school shootings, the perpetrator has generally been a student who felt picked on and the victim(s) was usually those he felt was responsible or guilty of that behavior.

How prepared were they in Bailey? Columbine is less than an hour away. Were teachers and students trained in any way in how to deal with a school attack or hostage taking of this type?

Can we protect our children in schools? Do we have to accept that a certain number will die on occasion because there is simply no way to insure their safety?

Many schools, even in presumably safe cities like Cheyenne, have full-time police personnel assigned on premise. Some, like the Red Lake Indian Reservation school in northern Minnesota, have metal detectors. Yet, within the span of 24 hours in September, there were two unrelated but fatal school invasions - separated by a thousand miles.

If it were a man dressed in a business suit, it would be a little more understandable how he penetrated the building. Staff and students could have mistaken him for someone who was authorized access.

But how does a creep like the one in Bailey, Colorado, looking and acting like a creep, get into the school without an adult challenging his presence?

Schools have more than one entrance. At least, most do. Some lock all of them after the morning bell but not all do. The unthinkable happened to the United States on September 11, 2001 and the country has gone to tremendous expense to prevent a recurrence. Unthinkable acts happen in schools across the United States on a regular, if not frequent, basis and what have we done?

There is the presumption by parents that their school-age children will be safe. That they will return home that same evening and not have horror stories to tell about an assault, knifing, shooting or death in their school that day. Bullying on school buses and school property cannot be tolerated. Whatever it takes to eliminate deadly school invasions, by disgruntled students or perverted adults, must be done. We cannot justify trying to make things better for Iraqis when we have the same need on our soil.

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