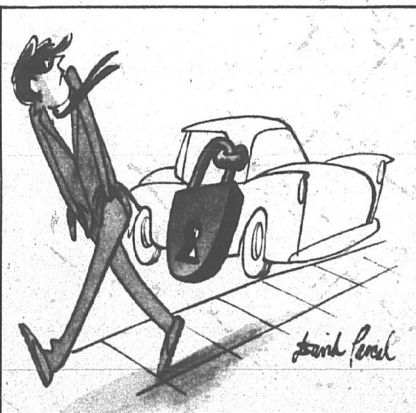


Could You Have Stopped These Crimes?

A woman screams, a child disappears, a car is stolen—here are common-sense rules every citizen should follow when face to face with lawbreaking

By **PETER J. PITCHESS**, as told to Patricia and Ron Deutsch
Sheriff of Los Angeles County



CAR THEFT: Mary Peck parked her car in her own driveway and dashed into her house to get a package, leaving her car keys behind. She came out to see a stranger driving the car away. Just then a neighbor drove up. What should Mary have done to stop the crime?

1. Given chase in the neighbor's car, forcing the thief to stop.
2. Called the police, giving them make, model, color, etc.
3. Removed the key and locked the car before leaving it.

The third answer is obvious but worth stating. Auto theft is perhaps our biggest major crime, and two-thirds of the cars are stolen by juveniles, who often merely watch for an unlocked car with keys in it.

As second choice, Mary should have called us fast. Most states now have radio alarms which can bring in stolen cars in minutes. But Mary chose to pursue the thief with a neighbor. The thief, in panic, drove at furious speed. Mary and her neighbor tried to keep up and were hurt in a crash. Chases are not for amateurs.

MISSING CHILD: Seven-year-old Sue Mills had been at play all morning and did not return for lunch at noon. By 12:45 p.m. Mrs. Mills started phoning neighbors. By 1:30 she had walked all through the neighborhood, and still no Sue. What would have been the right action to prevent a crime?

1. Phone police at 2 p.m.
2. Phone police at 12:30, before phoning the neighbors.
3. Phone police in the morning.

It may seem illogical in one sense, but Mrs. Mills should have phoned us in the morning. Her first failure was in leaving a child of Sue's age unsupervised for three or four hours. So often when a child is lost or involved in a crime, we find that the parents have let the child wander on his own.

The time to call us? The moment you are concerned for your child's safety. That way, you still can go on with your own search, but valuable time will not be lost. If you find the child, we'll be as pleased as you are.

We found Sue Mills—100 miles away in a car with a known sex offender! Luckily, she was unharmed. But the criminal had a start of three hours before we could put out the net to catch him.

Know where your child is all the time! Teach him not to accept invitations, gifts, or rides from strangers. And the moment you can't account for his whereabouts, call us.

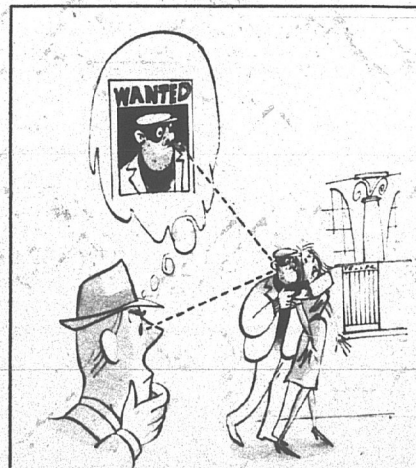
ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAVID PASCAL

EVERY MINUTE in America, four major crimes are committed. And despite all that we in law enforcement can do, the shocking rate is increasing *five times* as fast as the population growth. It is up almost 50 percent since 1958.

Is there no one who can stop this vicious growth? It may surprise you to learn that only you can do the job.

This is not a catch phrase. It is a cold, simple fact. For the truth is that, though most Americans are quick to help the police, they do not know how.

Here are seven typical crimes we dealt with in Los Angeles County last year. Each illustrates a basic way you can protect yourself by preventing crimes or by helping us catch wrongdoers before they strike again. Test yourself to see whether you would have chosen the courses that would have stopped the crimes.



BANK ROBBERY: As Tom Foster came into a small bank, he saw a robber with a gun using a woman teller as a shield. What should Tom have done?

1. Jumped the robber.
2. Run from the bank, shouting for help.
3. Stared at the robber.

Tom tried to jump the man, who fired, missed, and ran away. But Tom's courage could have got him or the woman teller killed. Don't try to be a hero with an armed man who may be nervous and frightened. That is fool's courage. The same goes for running from the bank.

Surprisingly, we will be happiest if you just stare. After most robberies, the victims cannot even give us enough description so that we can put out an alarm for the criminal. People panic and see nothing but the gun and the action.

So use your eyes. Note height, weight, coloring, details of clothing (criminals rarely change clothes until hours later), and scars or marks. Without this effort, you may not even recognize the criminal later.