Shoemaker Village

Volume 31 - September 1999



Will the Knights be victorious? Find out in *The Knights of the Square Table*!

In Neighborhood News... Is this your cat?



PLUS!

Neighbors discuss recent vandalism in The Discussion Forum!

Two editions of Neighborhood News!

The Bear Facts returns!

Village announces open position for Neighborhood News Editor!

See Editor's Pages for Details!

Table of Contents

September 1999

Editor's Pages 3-4
Acknowledgments 5
Puzzle Page 6

Neighborhood News August 1999 7-8
Neighborhood News September 1999 9
Lost and Found 9
Going to the Dogz 10
The Bear Facts 10
Humor From the Village Square 10-14

The Discussion Forum
Response to the Shoemaker Village News 15-16
Vandalism: The Scourge of Society 17
The Rampant Vandalism in Our Country Todayx 18
Vandalism: An Out of Control Problem 19-20

The Knights of the Square Table Chapter 5 21-26

Editor's Pages

Information you should know

Thank you for reading the September issue of *Shoemaker Village*!

Last month, as almost everyone already knows, the *Village* was canceled, and letters were sent to all of our subscribers informing them of the change. The main reason for the cancellation was that all three of the *Village's* contributing editors were unavailable for various reasons. Therefore, the best course of action was postponing the *Village* until this month and holding all content that was planned for last month for inclusion into this issue.

To that end, you may have noticed in the Table of Contents that there are two Neighborhood News sections listed. Last month, before the cancellation, I finished my contributions ahead of schedule and awaited the replies of our other staff. When the issue was canceled, it made more sense to simply hold these articles instead of deleting them. As a result, the Neighborhood News has double the usual content, the Short Stories section has several stories that I was holding, and *The Knights of the Square Table* is also a bit longer.

An article submitted by one of our readers and included in The Discussion Forum brings up several interesting points about the *Village* that I would like to address. The first suggestion that this reader makes is that the *Village* consider running advertisements from neighborhood residents and from businesses in The Marketplace. To anyone else who has suggested this before, be assured that this has been considered many times. In fact, in May 1998, the *Village* asked neighborhood subscribers if they would like to run ads in the magazine. Because nobody responded, the idea was subsequently dropped. Currently, there are two main problems that hinder us from running paid advertisements. The first is that there is not enough interest from potential advertisers to run ads in the *Village*. The second, and more important reason, is that only a small fraction of the *Village*'s subscribers reside in the neighborhood. Most attend UMHS, live in Willow Grove and would not patronize businesses in The Marketplace because it is simply too far away to go shopping.

As to printing the positive contributions of neighborhood families, we are always looking to include positive news. Unfortunately, we can only publish what we know, and most of the time, that is very little. Since I have to be responsible for all of the sections in the *Village*, including the Neighborhood News, I usually am only able to publish what I have heard, since it would be impossible to devote more time to interviewing residents, especially during the school year. Several times in the past, we have sent out pleas for a neighborhood news editor, but they have often gone unheeded. If you are actively involved in the neighborhood and would like to contribute, contact us at the address on the Acknowledgments page. If you're not a good writer but are inquisitive, you can simply submit notes and someone on *the Village* staff will turn them into articles. I sincerely hope that somebody will take on this important job in the future.

As to the last statement made about legal issues associated with publication, we have already taken the necessary precautions. Last month, there was a misunderstanding concerning an article reporting on vandalism in the neighborhood. Reference was made to specific actions caused by specific individuals. However, the entire article did not accuse those same individuals for all the vandalism occurring in the area. The phrase "unknown vandals" meant just that–we have no idea who these vandals are. We apologize for any hardship this caused the specific individuals and their family. We also apologize to those subscribers who were unwillingly caught up in this misunderstanding and sincerely hope that this will not affect their enjoyment of *Shoemaker Village*.

Thank you to this reader for submitting comments. If you have any comments, feel free to submit them, because they are always read and considered.

In other happenings, you may have noticed the absence of contributions in this issue from our regular staff. Again, one of our three contributing editors was not available during most of the month to write for the *Village*. It was not possible to cancel this issue after the last one being canceled, so we have published what we currently have. We hope to be operating as normal in time for October's issue. Thank you for those who came through at the last minute.

Thank you to all who responded to our second subscription drive throughout the neighborhood. There are currently nine subscribers as a direct result of the two drives that occurred during the past two months. The Torjman and Hammerman families are the most recent subscribers. Thank you for your support.

That's all for this month! Enjoy the rest of the summer and we hope to be hearing from you in October!

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The Torjman Family
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The next issue of *Shoemaker Village* will be published on Friday, September 24, 1999.
All contributions for the next issue must be received by Tuesday, September 22, 1999.

Upcoming topics in **The Discussion Forum:**
October 1999: Is it fair to allow animals to roam the neighborhood unattended?
November 1999: Will the Y2K bug cause a breakdown of the world as we know it, or will nothing happen?
February 2000: Is the state of the environment better or worse than it was twenty years ago?

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Puzzle Page

C U T S E V R A H S I N I F M
V O H R T Z L G W M N M C E U
F A R O A N Z L X K I A L E J
P G E N M C A Q O E E F E C J
X B S K C W T L B A N R A B N
P U H G H O A O P E D E N F L
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Acre
Active
Autumn
Barn
Beans
Blades
Bushel
Chaff
Clean
Corn Cobs
Crew
Crop
Cuts
Drive
Dust
Early
Fall
Farmer
Field
Finish
Gears
Harvest
Kernel
Load
Night
Plants
Plow
Power
Separate
Silo
Store
Thresher
Tractor
Truck
Wagon

Neighborhood News
August 1999

ACCIDENT ALONG PIONEER ROAD; NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENT A HERO

On Friday, July 23, at about 11:30 p.m., another accident occurred along Pioneer Road, causing neighbors to wonder when the streak of accidents that has now involved five cars in two months will stop.

The vehicle, which had been traveling north on Pioneer Road, hit a telephone pole in front of the Barnes' house. It then overturned and skidded along the road, causing large black marks that still exist.

Reportedly, the accident involved two juveniles who had been drinking. The car also did not have a license plate, which inferred that it had been stolen earlier.

According to one resident, there were two people in the car. The driver, who was dazed, managed to get out of the car and leave the scene.

Reportedly, Scott Slousky, son of Shelly and Drew Slousky, who lives on Butternut Drive, was present when the accident occurred. Hearing a loud crash, he raced to Pioneer Road to see what had happened. Upon seeing one of the kids involved leaving the scene of the accident, Scott chased after the individual, tackling him and holding him at bay until the police arrived to arrest him.

One of the occupants in the car was reportedly treated for head injuries. It is unknown if charges were filed against the driver.

Scott was congratulated later by the police for his heroic deed. "[The police] called and thanked Scott," because they might not have caught the driver, Shelly Slousky said recently during a phone call.

This marks the fifth accident during the past two months. Though many were minor fender benders, these events leave many neighbors uneasy about the safety of Pioneer Road. "All that the reconstruction project did was allow people to speed down the road," one neighbor said. "Before that, the potholes at least slowed them down."

As you may recall, a serious accident in late May involved a car skidding into the Hoffmans' driveway, leaving permanent skid marks on the road and snapping a telephone wire. Hopefully, there will be no more problems along Pioneer Road, but we'll keep you informed in the future.

FIFTH WORST DROUGHT OF CENTURY CONTINUES TO AFFECT AREA

The drought that has plagued the area since late May has now been included as one of the five worst this century, weather forecasters say.

A state of drought emergency was declared in late July, after the lack of rain had caused a six-inch deficit during the last six months. Water restrictions, as of publication date, have been in place for over a month.

As it has been stated on the news many times before, the restrictions mean that residents may not water their lawns, use water for recreational purposes, or use a sprinkler to water landscaping.

Trees will be hit the hardest, however, and should be the first priority when watering. Many in the area already show some signs of damage from the drought, as shown by the row of trees that have few leaves along Shoemaker Road. Ironically, the trees were planted there little more than a year ago.

Though the trees will suffer the most damage, the most noticeable effects of the drought are shown in neighbors' lawns, which have been reduced to a pile of decaying straw. If the rains do not return before the end of August, forecasters say, lawns will not regrow until next Spring.

The color display this Autumn will also be earlier and less pronounced than usual. If precipitation totals do not return to normal before September, the fall foliage season could occur as many as two weeks earlier than usual,

meaning that leaves could begin to show their colors as early as the first day of school!

The drought currently ranks fifth among the worst droughts this century. According to weather forecasters, bad droughts tend to last three to five years. Since there was also below normal rainfall last year, this may be only the beginning, and the drought may continue for another one to three years.

Neighborhood News

September 1999

DROUGHT FINALLY WINDING DOWN

Just when it seemed as if the drought that has been affecting the area for the past few months would never come to an end, storms brought enough rain to exceed the average precipitation totals for August.

The biggest of the month, storms dumped 3.33" of rain on the neighborhood and surrounding area on the weekend of August 15-16.

That weekend, severe thunderstorms released over three inches of rain in little more than an hour as a series of storms passed.

The rain was more than enough to save trees and grass, but levels of creeks and reservoirs are still well below normal and have been for several months.

Neighbor Jean Sokolowski, whose family was getting tired of watering their landscaping and vegetable garden every three days throughout the duration of the drought, summed up the state of things when she commented during a much needed storm, "So that's what rain looks like!"

OTHER NEWS TIDBITS

Though there usually isn't that much news in late Summer, here's what's been happening in brief:

-A new utility pole was installed at the site of last month's accident involving a car that flipped over when the driver had been drinking. As you may have noticed, the old pole had been leaning dangerously far into the street for years before.

-A neighborhood millennium party will be held on Friday, December 31, 1999. Flyers were circulated to all neighbors on Butternut and Acorn. As of publication, seven families have expressed an interest. If you live in the development and want to be a part of this fun celebration, call the number on the flyer or send a letter to the *Village* and we'll be sure you're put on the list. Plans will be finalized at a meeting of those interested sometime in October.

Lost and Found

CAT SPOTTED, ANIMAL CONTROVERSY CONTINUES

During the third week of August, neighbor Henry Sokolowski was outside playing basketball when he came face-to-face with a cat that had been spotted several times around the neighborhood earlier that month.



This cat was spotted several times in the neighborhood during August.

As he continued to play, the cat climbed in and out of trees and his wife's flowers. Later, the cat was seen holding on for dear life to the screen of his front door.

Many in the neighborhood are growing increasingly more concerned that animals roaming the neighborhood may cause injury to residents. Several dogs have been spotted recently, all of which were capable of attacking at any time because they were not restrained by their owners.

"Every time I venture outside and hear the clink of a rattling chain," one neighbor commented recently, "I look around thinking that a dog could be coming this way."

Going to the Dogz

DOG SIGHTED AGAIN



A large, black Rottweiler-type dog was spotted yet again roaming the neighborhood unrestrained in August.

This dog was spotted near the Altimaris' yard.

Several neighbors point out that there is another dog, that looks similar to Max, who has been around the neighborhood recently. For obvious reasons, we were unable to identify if the dog was actually Max or not.

Keep reading as the controversy over animal safety continues.

The Bear Facts

by Lori Blickley

Summer went so quickly. It flew! Summer actually grew wings and flew right past me. I cannot believe that school will be back in session starting September 8th. Already, there are many things planned for our first month of the 1999-2000 school year.

On the 10th of this month, Student Council will be sponsoring a "Welcome Back" dance. These evening dances start at eight o'clock and run until eleven o'clock. If you're a student, come dance and join the fun!

With clubs and other activities, there are several meetings scheduled. If you're a UM student who would like to do some volunteer service and join an organization that likes to improve our community, join Upper Moreland High School's Key Club. Their first meeting is Monday the 13th, starting at 7:00 p.m.. Meetings don't tend to last too long. It is just a time to organize activities and inform members of the upcoming events. If you enjoy Special Olympians (children with disadvantages), with Key Club, you can get the opportunity to work with them and enjoy their company.

Another service organization to get involved with is Interact. They will be holding meetings on the 14th and the 28th. New members are always welcome.

For any parents who may be interested, Open House will be the 15th.

In sports action, all of our athletic teams are working hard to make their 1999 fall season a success. Summer camp began Monday, August 23rd. And, for many of our fall sports, teams are having two practices a day getting ready for the tough competition. Fall sports offered at the high school are golf, field hockey, girls' tennis, boys' soccer, cross country, football, and cheerleading.

Band camp also started. For field purposes, the band has to practice at our middle school for the remainder of the summer. These musically talented students put in long hours to perfect their rhythm, tone, marching, and performance.

Many other activities are taking place in Upper Moreland High School within the first month back. However, I am not aware of nearly all of them.

Humor from the Village Square

THE PHOTOGRAPHER

The photographer for a national magazine was assigned to get photos of a great forest fire. Smoke at the scene was too thick to get any good shots, so he frantically called his home office to hire a plane.

"It will be waiting for you at the airport!" he was assured by his editor.

As soon as he got to the small, rural airport, sure enough, a plane was warming up near the runway. He jumped in with his equipment and yelled, "Let's go! Let's go!" The

pilot swung the plane into the wind and soon they were in the air.

"Fly over the north side of the fire," said the photographer, "and make three or four low level passes."

"Why?" asked the pilot.

"Because I'm going to take pictures! I'm a photographer, and photographers take pictures!" said the photographer with great exasperation and impatience.

After a long pause the pilot said, "You mean you're not the instructor?"

FREE HAIRCUTS

A barber gave a haircut to a priest one day. The priest tried to pay for the haircut but the barber refused, saying, "I cannot accept money from you, for you are a good man. You do God's work." The next morning the barber found a dozen bibles at the door to his shop.

A policeman came to the barber for a haircut, and again the barber refused payment, saying, "I cannot accept money from you, for you are a good man. You protect the public." The next morning the barber found a dozen doughnuts at the door to his shop.

A lawyer came to the barber for a haircut, and again the barber refused payment, saying, "I cannot accept money from you, for you are a good man. You serve the justice system." The next morning the barber found a dozen more lawyers waiting for a haircut.

CLOCKS

A guy dies and goes to heaven. It's a slow day for St. Peter, so, upon passing the entrance test, St. Peter says: "I'm not very busy today. Why don't you let me show you around?"

The guy thinks this is a great idea and graciously accepts the offer. St. Peter shows him all the sights--the golf course, the reading room and library, the observation room, the cafeteria-- and finally, they come to a HUGE room full of clocks.

The guy asks, "What's up with these clocks?"

St. Peter explains, "Everyone on earth has a clock that shows how much time he has left on earth. When a clock runs out of time, the person dies and comes to the Gates to be judged."

The guy thinks this makes sense but notices that some of the clocks are going faster than others. He asks why that is.

St. Peter explains, "Every time a living person tells a lie, it speeds his clock."

This also makes sense, so the guy takes one last look around the room before leaving and notices one clock in the center of the ceiling. On this clock, both hands are spinning at an unbelievable rate. So he asks, "What's the story with that clock?"

"Oh, that," St. Peter replies. "That's President Clinton's clock. We decided to use it as a fan."

DEAD DOGS

A lady awoke one morning and discovered her dog was not moving. She called her vet who asked her to bring the dog in. After a brief examination, the vet pronounced the dog dead.

"Are you sure?" the distraught woman asked. "He was a great family pet. Isn't there anything else you can do?"

The vet paused for a moment and said, "There is one more thing we can do." He left the room for a moment and came back carrying a large cage with a cat in it. The vet opened the cage door and the cat walked over to the dog. The cat sniffed the dog from head to toe and walked back to the cage.

"Well, that confirms it," the vet announced. "Your dog is dead."

Satisfied that the vet had done everything he possibly could, the woman sighed, "How much do I owe you?"

"That will be $330," the vet replied.

"I don't believe it!!!" screamed the woman. "What did you do that cost $330???"

"Well", the vet replied, "it's $30 for the office visit and $300 for the cat scan."

CHLORINE IN THE GENE POOL

Some evidence that the gene pool may need a little chlorine:

Sign in a gas station: Coke -- 49 cents. Two for a dollar.

I was signing the receipt for my credit card purchase when the clerk noticed that I had never signed my name on the back of the credit card. She informed me that she could not complete the transaction unless the card was signed. When I asked why, she explained that it was necessary to compare the signature on the credit card with the signature I just signed on the receipt. So I signed the credit card in front of her. She carefully compared that signature to the one I signed on the receipt. As luck would have it, they matched.

At a grocery store in San Jose, they have new credit card/bank card readers at the checkout stands. If you don't know how to orient your card to swipe it through the reader, the checkout person will say, "Strip down. Face toward me."

A customer at a sub shop ordered "a small soda." The owner responded, "I'm sorry, sir, but we don't have small--just medium and large." (Both cost 99 cents.) The kicker came when the customer, a rather well-dressed business type, disappointedly said, "Okay, I guess I'll just have to have the medium then."

After interviewing a particularly short-spoken job candidate, I described the person to my boss as rather monosyllabic. My boss said, Really? Where is Monosyllabia?" Thinking that he was just kidding, I played along and said that it was just south of Elbonia. He replied, "Oh, you mean over by Croatia?"

An actual tip from page 16 of the HP "Environmental, Health & Safety Handbook for Employees.": "Blink your eyelids periodically to lubricate your eyes."

I live in a semi-rural area. We recently had a new neighbor call the local township administrative office to request the removal of the Deer Crossing sign on our road. The reason: Many deer were being hit by cars and he no longer wanted them to cross there.
My neighbor works in the operations department in the central office of a large bank. Employees in the field call him when they have problems with their computers. One night he got a call from a woman in one of the branch banks who had this question: "I've got smoke coming from the back of my terminal. Do you guys have a fire downtown?"

My daughter went to a local Taco Bell and ordered a taco. She asked the individual behind the counter for "minimal lettuce." He said he was sorry, but they only had iceberg.

A co-worker was telling us about her sister who was coming to visit her for the holidays. Someone asked how old her sister was, at which she paused, thought for a bit, and then answered, "She's half as old as I am. That's how I always remember." So someone else (okay, it was me) said, "That's neat. So every year that you age, she only ages half a year?" My co-worker thought about that, and then said, "Oh, yeah. I guess it only works on even years."

THE GOLFER AND THE PINE TREE

A young man who was also an avid golfer found himself with a few hours to spare one afternoon. He figured if he hurried and played very fast, he could get in 9 holes before he had to head home. Just as he was about to tee off, an old gentleman shuffled onto the tee and asked if he could accompany the young man, as he was golfing alone. Not being able to say no, he allowed the old gent to join him.

To his surprise the old man played fairly quickly. He didn't hit the ball far, but plodded along consistently and didn't waste much time. Finally, they reached the 9th fairway and the young man found himself with a tough shot. There was a large pine tree right in front of his ball - and directly between his ball and the

green.

After several minutes of debating how to hit the shot, the old man finally said, “You know, when I was your age I'd hit the ball right over that tree.”

With that challenge placed before him, the youngster swung hard, hit the ball up, right smack into the top of the tree trunk and it thudded back on the ground not a foot from where it had originally lay.

The old man offered one more comment. “Of course, when I was your age, that pine tree was only 3 feet tall.”

ENGINEER GOLFER

A pastor, a doctor and an engineer were waiting one morning for a particularly slow group of golfers. The engineer fumed. “What's with these guys? We must have been waiting for 15 minutes!”

The doctor chimed in, “I don't know, but I've never seen such ineptitude!”

The pastor said, “Hey, here comes the greens keeper. Let's have a word with him. Hi, George. Say, what's with that group ahead of us? They're rather slow, aren't they?”

The greens keeper replied, “Oh, yes, that's a group of blind firefighters. They lost their sight saving our clubhouse from a fire last year, so we always let them play for free anytime.”

The group was silent for a moment. The pastor said, “That's so sad. I think I will say a special prayer for them tonight.”

The doctor said, “Good idea. And I'm going to contact my ophthalmologist buddy and see if there's anything he can do for them.”

The engineer said, “Why can't these guys play at night?”

IF ONLY EVERYONE THOUGHT THIS WAY

Back Up My Hard Drive? How do I Put it in Reverse?

I just got lost in thought. It was unfamiliar territory.

Everyone has a photographic memory. Some don't have film.

When the chips are down, the buffalo is empty.

Seen it all, done it all, can't remember most of it.

Those who live by the sword get shot by those who don't.

I feel like I'm diagonally parked in a parallel universe.

He's not dead. He's electroencephalographically challenged.

She's always late. Her ancestors arrived on the June Flower.

You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say will be misquoted, then used against you.

I wonder, how much deeper would the ocean be without sponges?

Honk if you love peace and quiet.

Pardon my driving. I am reloading.

Despite the cost of living, have you noticed how it remains so popular?

Nothing is fool-proof to a sufficiently talented fool.

Diplomacy is saying “nice doggy” until you find a rock.

A day without sunshine is like, you know, night.

Save the whales. Collect the whole set.

Atheism is a non-prophet organization.

On the other hand . . . , you have different fingers.

Response to the Shoemaker Village News

I recently received my first copy of the Neighborhood newspaper 7/99 and was quite impressed. It appears to be a detailed and thorough review of the area's happenings. I would hope that other families not only become subscribers but also attempt to contribute to the paper. However, I do want to make a few comments and recommendations. First, I suggest that you consider running ads from area businesses (the shopping center and from the neighbors themselves.) I imagine that you have considered doing so, as it would seem like a natural thing to do. Next, I suggest that you consider printing the positive contributions of the neighborhood kids and families–who helped who, who did well in sports or in school. The next recommendation is to be careful in printing statements about what kids did or didn't do. Legal issues of libel and slander are serious journalistic realities. You can "allege" that so and so did something, but without proof it is hard to say someone is guilty of something. That is what the courts must decide.

To that end I want to comment on the family most targeted in the recent edition. Especially in light of the fact that they got a copy to read. First off, I believe that many of the incidents were directly a result of the family's actions. Probably many more than what is noted in the paper. That doesn't excuse their actions or lessen the responsibility their family must bear. I have no desire to punish them for past deeds but do believe that the only way to promote positive change is to work with them. However, if there are future occurrences, they should be dealt with swiftly and harshly. All individuals should be accountable for their actions, even their parents when the child does not know right from wrong.

No one moved into this area wanting to live with kids and families that have no respect for others. The Upper Moreland Police are well aware of the family and their struggles. I know in many respects our hands are tied, but there are ways to achieve legal relief. I suggest that we all try talking to them about the problems first, which I know many families have attempted to do. Another option

would be a neighborhood petition outlining the concerns and possible solutions. If that fails, we probably will have to take it to the Courts. I would rather hope that lesser measures could bring about a liveable arrangement for everyone, without going to the extreme. Trespassing, vandalism, property destruction are serious crimes. It's sad that, in our quiet suburban community, these urban issues are a fact of life for us. It doesn't have to be that way.

I want to close by noting that singling out one family makes me uncomfortable. I very clearly know that no one is perfect. I also know that other neighborhood youth have committed similar infractions. Wrong is wrong. No one else should be excused from their misdeeds, lest we think it's fair to point blame in one direction only. The problem is too many parents in this neighborhood have the "Oh, not my child" attitude. Or," It's only kids being kids".

Unfortunately, if the child thinks it's okay now to get away with petty crime, what will it be tomorrow? I would love to see more parents actually watching activities outside and being with their children in the neighborhood. Too many folks have this "let them be on their own" mentality. If they only knew? So before anyone else says, "Not my kid", stop and ask yourself if you really know what they are doing? If you don't, shouldn't you? The future for our kids, ourselves, our neighborhood depends on everyone being a contributor--not just another random, removed property owner. If you expect someone else to always take care of your problems, there will always be those problems. Nothing will change unless there is a total commitment to change, from everyone. Sounds like Smokey the Bear politics, but positive/simple/family values are just that. Common Sense.

Unfortunately, common sense is a rare commodity these days. If it's not taught in school or at home, then where will the futures leaders learn it? A favorite saying of mine is that we are either part of the problem or part of the solution. By doing nothing, we can only be part of the problem. Wouldn't it be nice to be part of the solution instead?

Vandalism: The Scourge Of Society

I have a real problem with vandalism. And if you go around spray-painting walls and keying cars because you're bored or to make you feel like a big-shot or because you somehow failed to learn common courtesy, then I have a problem with you, too. Common vandalism is rampant in the city. There's no question of that. However, as the city limits get hazier, it starts creeping into the suburbs. Moreover, there is definitely something lacking in the field of common courtesy these days. The degradation of morals in contemporary society never ceases to boggle the mind. No matter where you live, there's always going to be trouble-makers. What the pathetic people who perform these acts don't realize is that it's really just an annoyance to society, not a big deal.

"Duh, I writed my name on a wall."

"Oh, you rebel, you."

You want to feel important? Go get a job! Do some laundry. Do something important that impresses the WHOLE of society. It'd be nice if the city were prettier. I won't lie, though. I'd be the last person to volunteer to clean it up. I strongly support a policy portrayed in an SNL sketch I once saw. If you graffiti your name on public property, we will paint "sucks" next to it. Funny, huh? I'm not sure there is any good deterrent for this crime. It's hard enough catching people in the act. What punishment do you give to keep them from doing it again?

I've never been a vandal. I've never been the target of vandalism. Vandalism accomplishes nothing, and it's a real classless thing to do. I have an idea of what I'd do if it happened to me. If I were put through what the neighborhood has been . . . well, I wouldn't have been so . . . law abiding in my quest for retribution. I'd have found out who it was and beat 'em to death. But, that's why I don't own a house and a pool and have punk kids for neighbors. And, that's also why I have a few more years to learn how to resolve my disputes maturely and peacefully. I'm just saying that I wouldn't have put up with it. For the neighborhood's sake, I am glad it's over.

The Rampant Vandalism in Our Country Today

If you have gone to any populated area today, you should notice graffiti on walls and cars being looted. The cities, like Philadelphia, are become havens for these misdemeanor crimes. But, if you live in a suburb, you also may have noticed the problem migrating toward you. Although not as severe, suburbs are becoming small cities, with graffiti and stolen cars, etc.. Let's take the suburb of Upper Moreland, for example. Lately, our school and areas around it have been "written upon" by people. Also, the bridge near the school has been defaced and the tunnel walls underneath it as well. Near where I live, kids play a game called "Freedom". Now the game itself resembles tag, but with teams. And when played, it is a very cool game. Yet the kids who play it around my house find it necessary to run and hide in yards, destroying things around them and disregarding warnings from neighbors. And kids in my neighborhood have been caught doing drugs, causing an even greater stoop in the quality of living in the suburbs. In parking lots around the mall, car alarms are constantly going off. Also, as a sign of the times, the recent "Woodstock '99" (which I wish I had gone to) was devastated by extreme accounts of looting and vandalism. Trailers were set ablaze and vendors were put into serious danger. Some people say that the cause was the music, some say it was the high prices, but whatever it was, it doesn't matter. It just shows how something born in peace and love can become vile and warlike. Maybe it is just a fad, like bellbottoms and lava lamps, and maybe it will die out with the generation. Or maybe it will continue and grow to be an accepted part of society like skateboarding. Maybe there will be defacing tournaments. Who knows what the future will hold.

Vandalism: An Out of Control Problem

Many neighbors who live in the area and have witnessed the recent vandalism spree have become tired of the destruction. W hat is important, however, is that it is stopped immediately to avoid any future problems.

The underlying problem is apathy. People just don't care or they are in a state of denial, refusing to believe that something like what is currently happening is actually going on. Apathy has caused several major wars. When certain people don't care about something, it allows others to exploit them to get whatever they want.

This is common. Many whom the vandalism hasn't affected think that it will never happen to them, and, therefore, won't take any action to prevent future transgressions. If the entire community banded together and finally said that they had had enough, this current streak of vandalism would have never occurred, as several minor events had happened in the past.

Throughout April and May, I observed as property around the neighborhood was vandalized and saw the damage total mount. The police were called several times. Fortunately, the same patrolman arrived every time. This man patiently wrote reports and talked to neighborhood children, but nothing seemed to help. The vandalism continued despite the police warnings. Ironically, the worst didn't occur until after the police had warned the people in the neighborhood.

Later in June, I contributed an article to be published in the July issue of *Shoemaker Village*, detailing the damage that had occurred during the months before. Having distributed the issue, I quickly forgot about it and got ready for a vacation that my parents had planned for later that week.

Since then, however, there has been **no** damage whatsoever, as if the vandals have disappeared from the face of the planet. Even though angry neighbors, numerous police warnings, and other actions that were taken had no effect, an article in a small home-based magazine seemed to help put an end to the vandalism. I haven't heard of even *one* act that has taken place, *anywhere* in the

neighborhood. This proves that if the vandals are embarrassed enough, they will stop.

As you can see by this example, it takes people who care about the neighborhood to stop the vandalism. It should be fairly obvious that there isn't just one person who is causing all the damage. Unfortunately, many parents don't watch their children closely enough and simply assume that it can't be *their* kids.

Even though it may be juveniles that are destroying the neighborhood, it is partially their parents fault. As I stated in May, a youngster's parents are the main forces in his or her life until they grow up and move away. Some sort of discipline is needed to keep them from going astray.

I can see this clearly in my family. When I was in elementary school, if I did something wrong, I was sent to my room or disallowed certain privileges. Up until a few weeks ago, however, my brother seemed to go through a stage during which it seemed that he caused trouble all the time. My parents, though they yelled loudly and often, took no direct action against him, and I watched as he continued to bother me and cause trouble. Then, suddenly, he was sent to his room for some act. It was amazing how he changed when he emerged, and to this day, he rarely causes trouble any more.

The real cause of much of today's trouble, though, reaches much farther than that. Many people today, it seems, have no respect for others' property. If you look in UMHS, there are plenty of examples, from the graffiti that somebody painted on the walls last June, the desks which are carved with obscenities, to the mouse pads that are ripped up. What's most alarming is that some people vandalize things without fear of being seen!

Hopefully, the vandalism around the neighborhood will continue to be absent over the next few months and we can all live in peace. If this is not the case, however, action must be taken immediately in order to keep the destruction from getting out of hand.

The Knights of the Square Table

Chapter 5

"Beautiful night," Dave commented, in spite of the chilly breeze blowing off the river to the west and the drizzle that never seemed to go away.

"Right," Mike said but not entirely sarcastically. Compared to some of the weather they had been experiencing before, tonight was a welcome break. The past six days had been cold and windy, much too cold for this time of year in that region. Yet, it was only a taste of what they would have to deal with when they arrived.

Presently, they were trekking through a forest, one of the few before the great plains that lay ahead. It would be fortunate that they would be traveling during the fall and winter, because in the summer, the heat would most likely be intense.

They stopped that night in a grove of trees. The edge of the forest was only a short distance away, and only shortly after that, the troll encampment. If they were to attack, it would have to be tomorrow, to give the trolls as little time as possible to get prepared.

As the knights around them were going through their possessions, so did the five, along with Jean, Benjamin, and Jeff. It had been decided that they would leave excess items hidden in the forest, with a small group of guards to keep watch. The rest of the knights would march toward the stronghold and begin the battle later that day.

Surprise was going to be their only advantage. A spy had revealed before that the fortification stood on a hill, with guard towers around the entire structure and walls that stood many feet high. The trolls that were encamped within the base were alleged to be in numbers of over twenty thousand. While there were about two thousand more knights in the army than trolls, it would be a battle well-earned.

Several commanders of the army suggested that they send for reinforcements. It was decided that the best course of action, however, would be to press on before the trolls also secured reinforcements.

As night finally fell and it was time to attack, it became obvious that the knights were becoming increasingly anxious and ready to move against the trolls. The delay was being caused by a group who had moved ahead to provide knowledge of defenses that were protecting the base.

Finally, the group returned with bad news. It appeared that the trolls had just brought in reinforcements of a thousand men. The good news was that if the trolls were caught unprepared, it might be possible to get into the fort with little trouble.

The orders were given by Jeff to move out immediately. It was only an hour to the fort from where they were located. In the plains, though, they were unprotected and vulnerable from all sides. They arrived within visual range of the fort about an hour and a half after leaving.

Hiding in the grass, the army out of range of the sight of the guards, they attempted to ascertain the strength of the fort's defenses. There were three guard towers on each wall. It was hard to believe that there were over 22,000 trolls inside, as the fortress looked as if it could barely support a castle, let alone a full-functioning military encampment.

It was pitch dark outside, and to their benefit the trolls had no shortage of lighting inside the fort. This would allow the knights to get closer without much interference.

The orders were finally given to move toward the fort. The first line carried bows and arrows, since other weapons would be useless until they were able to gain entry. Knights both on foot and on horseback followed.

Behind the lines, the strategists were planning the attack. The others had appointed Jeff as commander after seeing his skills played out in the battle of Riverbend.

"We need to eliminate the guards in the towers first," Jeff was explaining. "If we don't, our

entire army will be slaughtered by a handful of trolls in the towers."

"How are we going to penetrate their defenses? It would be impossible to destroy the towers because other guards would just come up to take their place," Christopher reminded.

"That's where you three come in," Jeff suggested. "Using the Stones, it might be possible to destroy the ladders leading to the towers through magic. Then, the fort being defenseless from the outside, they would be forced to either open the doors and come out fighting, or we can lay siege to them."

"Not having walkways on the top of the walls is a big weakness," Mike said, looking at the fort in the distance. The knights had been ordered to wait for the time being.

"I don't know if it will be possible to use the stones in this instance," Katie said.

"Why not?" Jeff asked.

"Well," she replied, "The stones' powers were badly drained a week ago in Riverbend. It might not be possible to use them again until they've recharged, which could take months."

"There must be some way to speed the process," Queen Jean suggested, glaring at Jeff because of this annoyance.

"I don't believe there is any way, your majesty," Chapin said quietly.

"Well, then," Jeff said, "we'll just have to deal with what we have. We are close enough now. According to the rules laid out in the Council of Seatown two years ago, all of the leaders of state present must agree in order to wage war. King Benjamin, do you agree?"

"Yes, I do," he replied exuberantly.

"I vote yes," Jeff said. "Queen Jean?"

"Well, all right," she said, sounding a bit flustered.

"Send a message to the front lines to attack immediately," Jeff said to a knight next to him who was protecting him during the journey.

"Yes, sir," he said and ran away at top speed. The leaders departed, each going to command their sections of the huge army that was now marching toward the fortress.

Less than ten seconds later, the clanking of swords and arrows was heard. A guard stationed above the gate sounded the alarm. A loud siren, probably powered by magic, began to chime. Suddenly the battlefield came alive; but at this point, it was clear that the allied knights had the upper hand. Though some of their men had fallen in front, others rushed up and the guards were soon overwhelmed before the rest of the trolls' army could mobilize.

"The stones," Jeff said. "Now!"

Christopher, Katie, and Chapin began to chant, holding the stones out in front of them. They were shining at only a fraction of the power that they had held before. Nevertheless, a cloud of brilliant colors began to spiral upward above the pulsating stones. For a brief moment, it looked as if the spell would work and the knights would be able to rush inside to victory. Suddenly, however, a dark cloud descended over the battlements, obscuring their view. The light from the stones stopped, and they oscillated wildly in the hands of their wielders.

The knights looked around wildly, but the trolls continued to fight despite the distraction, as if it weren't even there. Finally, the stones' light winked out. Nothing had changed. The spell had failed.

"What was that?" Christopher yelled among the noise of the battle.

"Some kind of spell that someone inside must have cast on us to prevent our tactics," Jeff said, riding up to them. "A knight near the front lines reports that he heard chanting inside before that happened.

"What do we do now? The stones have been completely drained," Katie pointed out.

There was a cry from near them. A knight fell, an arrow protruding from his leg. The four moved farther back. "We'll have to go to the contingency plan I devised earlier," Jeff said.

"And that is . . . ?" Mike asked hurriedly.

"We attempt to scale the walls. Some will die, but in the end we will be victorious." He rode

off without waiting for them to say a word.

"We have nothing to do here, then," Christopher said. "Let's fall back and watch from over there so we don't get killed by a stray arrow."

As the three hurried back to join Mike and Dave, who had been behind the army helplessly watching the battle, the front lines surged toward the walls, while those behind them picked off the guards in the towers. The battle seemed to be progressing just as planned. Though some fell before they reached the walls, there were knights right behind them, waiting to serve.

The lack of defense along the top of the walls worked to their advantage. Because of this, the trolls could simply not place enough men there to adequately defend the fort. As a result, the knights surged up and over the walls, and sword fights erupted in the towers.

As the battle raged, some managed to enter the fort, but, suddenly, nothing was happening. Though those who were able to penetrate the fort were expected to open the gates, there was no response from the inside. Suspecting a trap, Jeff ordered his men to fall back and see what happened next.

Though the trolls regained control of the guard towers, that was nothing compared to the disaster that was about to befall them. The gates began to open, and, before any of the knights could take advantage of this and enter, thousands of trolls emerged. What occurred next was nothing short of a complete massacre.

The huge trolls overwhelmed the knights and outnumbered them by over 2 to 1. The noise was deafening. From the back lines, Katie, Christopher, Dave, Mike, and Chapin could hear nothing, but saw the trolls advancing and the knights retreating toward them. Realizing that they were in grave danger if they didn't move immediately, they turned and ran as fast as they could.

The knights, even though they were in better physical condition, were wearing heavy armor that slowed them down. Some, near the back and away from immediate danger, realized that the armor wouldn't do any good against a troll twice their size and shed it onto the battlefield.

Jumping over pieces of armor and occasional dead bodies, the five ran for their lives. After about ten minutes, they could run no longer, but the trolls didn't stop to wait. Pressing on as best they could, they continued. Christopher and Chapin, who were accomplished swords people but now over sixty, lagged behind after a while.

Finally, after about twenty minutes, the trolls appeared to have been called back by their leader. The five stumbled through the grass that was up to their shoulders until they collapsed from exhaustion. When they stopped, a few knights who had managed to escape the disaster helped them back to the camp from the night before.

When they reached the camp, they found no more than a hundred trolls, all that was left of their army. The guards, who were protecting the possessions of the knights and who had obviously not been expecting a total massacre, were now rummaging through packs to bring back what they could to the families.

"Have they returned yet?" one knight on the far corner of the camp asked.

"Not yet," another replied.

"Whom are they talking about?" Christopher asked the knight.

"The King and Queen, of course," he replied. "And Jeff."

Jeff had never bothered with formal titles, as all his knights plainly called him "Jeff". But that was inconsequential now that he was missing and that they had suffered such a vast defeat.

The five went to sleep and awoke sometime after dawn. It was a chilly day again, but then it was already near the end of October. The grass that had been almost shoulder high and green the night before was now drooping and yellowed. Frost lingered on the remaining leaves of the sparse trees. There was no cover whatsoever for their camp, but they would also be able to see anyone within miles in any direction.

The camp had grown overnight, and there were now about a hundred-fifty knights around. Many were injured and lay on the ground recovering. Some didn't make it. There appeared to be one

knight, who was decorated as a division leader, who had been coordinating the escape effort.

Christopher approached him. "What are we going to do now?"

"I don't know," he replied. "I'm not in charge here. I don't know who is."

"We have to move quickly," Christopher said. "If the trolls find us, we'll all be killed."

"Are you appointing yourself leader? Jeff had said to me that you were capable if anything happened to him," the knight asked him bluntly.

"Not if anyone else has already assumed the position," Christopher replied smartly.

"Good." The knight smiled. "You can deal with this. I'm going to rest for a while." No sooner had he said that, he was heading to the other end of the campground.

"Well," Mike said. "That was quick."

"As I see it," Christopher said, getting right down to business, "we have a few options." He paused.

When nobody said anything, he continued. "We can return to the cities and stay there. That might not be advisable since the trolls most likely have already set out to attack them since there aren't enough knights there to hold them off. We can head north and continue our quest with the knights. Or, with some extreme luck, we might find a town along the way and add to our ranks."

"Do you really think the towns have been destroyed?" Mike asked him.

"Well, if . . . ," Christopher stopped because a knight was rushing toward him.

"I heard you were in charge now," he said as he skidded to a stop, panting. "There's bad news. The trolls just sent a force of at least thirty thousand out toward Riverbend," he said.

"Thanks," Dave said solemnly, and the knight went away.

"There's not enough power in the entire Harrogen army to hold back thirty thousand enraged trolls," Chapin said quietly.

"Our decision has been made then," Christopher said. "Our only choice is to continue our quest. Let's see what the knights think."

Christopher went to speak to the knights. Many were lying on the ground, injured, attended to by others who had medical expertise. They understood, just as the uninjured did, that their hometowns were gone.

They stayed there that night and decided that it would be best to leave the day after that, so that the injured could recuperate. It was getting colder every day, it seemed, and the nights were cold enough that blankets were now required. The last leaves fluttered off the trees, and frost highlighted whatever was still alive in the landscape.

When it was finally time to go, there were several knights who were still unable to walk on their own. Two had died since returning, and they were buried in a grave near the center of the camp. They then set off to the northwest, away from the troll stronghold, and finally turned due north.

They were only in possession of seven horses, as the rest had been killed or stolen during the battle. Since there were an equal number of injured men, it was necessary to allow them to ride the horses. The rest walked. It was easy walking through the plains, but the distance they were required to travel left them tired each night.

Since the days were growing shorter, it was necessary to walk as far as possible during the day in order to move as fast as possible. The nights were clear and cold, and it was impossible to walk in the pitch darkness. There wasn't a town in sight.

By the fifth day, they were far enough away from the troll stronghold in order to slow down. If the trolls had gone to destroy the towns, they would not be pursuing them northward.

Fortunately, they and the knights had packed enough supplies to allow them to survive for months during the harsh winters. Unfortunately, the sheer volume of supplies required that they load extra packs onto the few horses they had.

The absence of towns continued. Now Mike knew why this area was denoted on Christopher's map as the "Great Plains." The knights, surprisingly, never questioned Christopher's newfound authority. Dave, who was younger than the others, tired quickly. There weren't any bands of rogues as

they had had to deal with before, so this part of the journey was comparatively easy, even though it was colder than a month ago. The trek continued on for days.

The ground was hard now that it was beginning to freeze and Mike was restless. Nobody else seemed to be having his problem, as they were all tired from the long trek.

The sun was beginning to rise in the East, and along with it, the month of November began. They now estimated that they were about three weeks' travel east of the Dark Forest and approaching Yavin's stronghold fast. With luck, they could be there by December, depending on how soon the weather turned for the worse.

It was a crisp, clear morning. Deciding that he could sleep no longer, Mike got up and walked to the perimeter of where the knights were sleeping. He spotted Dave, Katie, and Chapin a few feet away, but Christopher was sleeping near the other knights, as he had other matters to attend to.

It had been so long since Mike had seen his home that he was now unsure of his motives for embarking on this quest. When he had tried the same twenty five years ago, he had attempted it to get home. Now, his home was in whatever world he was in. Mike had thought many times whether, given the choice, he would return, and had come to no definite conclusion.

Walking around, Mike's feet crumbled leaves and dead plants on the frozen ground. The sun began to warm the air, and knights began to stir. The watch that night had been a knight named Timothy, and he was beginning to nod off as the others woke up. The watches (there were three each night) were given the privilege of riding the horses the next day.

Timothy awoke Christopher, since the sun was now high enough for them to continue. They were on the move by about eight o'clock. This day seemed to be no different than the others. Each was harder than the last, it seemed.

Around noon, a knight suddenly shouted, "Look up!"

Christopher, in the front, looked to their right to find a dark speck in the sky unlike any he had seen before.

"What is it?" he asked in reply. "Is it a calk?"

"Everyone get down!" Chapin shouted, and the group hit the ground. However, the black spot did not appear to be getting any closer.

"All right," Christopher said. "Stand up."

"What do you think it is?" one knight asked suspiciously.

"It could be some sort of deception that Yavin is trying to fool us with," Katie replied.

"Is it safe to find out what it is?" Dave asked Christopher.

"There's only one way we can find out," Christopher replied. "Onward!"

The group turned to the east and trekked toward whatever was in the sky. Since it was only a few miles off their track, it wouldn't waste much time. It could prove to be a valuable find, however, and that was something that Christopher did not want to miss.

As they grew closer, the outline grew more apparent until one knight suddenly shouted out, "It's a city in the sky!"

The rest of the group stopped and looked up. Indeed, the outline of buildings was apparent. From where they were standing, the city appeared by be rather large, even larger than Riverbend.

"What's holding it up?" Dave asked in awe. There was no visible support. From directly underneath, the city would appear to be a slab of dirt high up in the sky. Above it, a dome of light shone over it.

"There must be some source of magic," Chapin suggested. "But why build a town in the sky when you can build it on the ground?"

"I don't know," Christopher said, "but there must be some way to find out."

"What are we supposed to do?" Katie requested sarcastically. "Climb all the way up there on a rope?"

"No, even better," Christopher retorted. "We'll use magic to fight against magic."

"Are you suggesting that we use the stones to somehow get us up there?"

Suddenly, the ground began to shake, slightly at first, and then grew more and more violent. Above the earthquake, the dome over the sky city seemed to flicker for a minute and then return to its normal luminescence. The quake ceased.

Before anyone could talk, Christopher said, "We must find out what this is now."

"The stones are only half regenerated," Katie said. After all these years, the secret to the stones' regenerative properties had finally been realized by Mike, who suggested that the moon recharged the stones once every lunar cycle. It had only been two weeks since the encounter with the trolls.

"We'll have to deal with what we've got," Christopher said.

"Do you know of any spell that could transport us that far?" Chapin asked, looking up at the city, which was almost a thousand feet up.

"I believe so," he replied, chuckling. "I may be old, but I remember a lot."

"Well then," Katie said, "do you think you could bother teaching it to us?" Christopher and the other two elementals discussed the spell among themselves for at least a half hour after that. When they were prepared, they held the stones up toward the sky and began chanting.

All of a sudden, it seemed as if they were moving. Beams of light came down from the sky from the city and brought them along the light until, before they knew it, they rematerialized in a narrow alleyway between large buildings.

The city was huge from what they could see but very organized. The entire place was laid out in a grid pattern, with narrow alleys between buildings. Every now and then, people passed into their view by walking down the main street. They were dressed differently than most people who lived on the ground. Some carried unknown objects at their sides, which looked like the three stones that the elementals possessed.

Behind them was the end of the city. There was no rail or wall, just a drop into emptiness a thousand feet below. Mike went to the edge to feel for any obstructions. Sure enough, he was met with resistance when he tried to place his hand over the edge. The partially invisible force field protected the citizens from falling to their doom. The buildings around him were made of stone, but were huge, much larger than any other buildings he had seen in this world before. The city noise was deafening compared to before.

When she looked behind her, Katie saw the entire army of knights standing there. "I thought only we were supposed to come," she stated indignantly. "We're going to get killed!"

"The spell is unpredictable," Christopher said.

They looked around. It was loud inside, quite different from the quiet there was on the plains. The dome above was barely visible, unlike the force field that had protected Riverbend.

Telling the knights to stay where they were and not make a sound, Christopher peeked around the corner of the buildings to a larger street. He was spotted immediately by a person wearing distinguishing clothes and appearing important.

"Welcome to the sky city Almheinz," he said. "We've been waiting a long time for you."