

Living in Fear



Open spaces, s



In the early evening a group of teens can be seen leaving a house beside Oatland's North Municipal Park. One boy turns away from the group, heading in the opposite direction; "Going for a walk?" his friend calls sarcastically.

"Better take a knife!" yells another.

Oatland's Park, referred to as 'the valley', is deserted. Like many open spaces in Somerset Heights, Oatlands North and Currie Park a skip seems randomly tossed onto the landscape where it leaks refuse broadly in every direction. No children play here and few dog-walkers stray from the tarred roads. "The skips definitely increase what I'd call the 'criminal element,'" says Captain Jafta of the Grahamstown Police, "vagrants are drawn to the area and we definitely see an increase in petty theft".

Open spaces should be spots of green tranquillity, injecting some fun into suburbia. Yet we are more concerned with protecting ourselves against what may stray from these eerie, unkempt places into our yards. "The fear of crime has a negative impact on quality of life at the individual, community and societal levels," says the Human Sciences Research Council, "reducing the sense of trust and cohesion within communities, limiting people's mobility and hastening retreat from public spaces". Nicholas Davenport, who looks

scary places

at the use of common land in Grahamstown in his Masters thesis, found that crime inhibits our involvement in our environment – preventing us from claiming parks and commons as part of our communities, often letting them become more neglected and crime-ridden. Kim Weber of Pam Golding Grahamstown refers to the use of common land for waste disposal as “a nightmare”, saying that safety in this regard is the number one concern for potential home buyers.

“The first thing they do is slap up a great big wall,” she says, adding that the additional costs of security could cut deep into a seller’s asking price; “when people see an uncontrolled piece of land their fear of the unknown kicks in, and one of their first considerations will be how much they need to spend to make those worries go away.”

Mandisi Plinga, Makana Municipality’s Director of Community and Social Services, says that while he understands residents’ concerns “we must interrogate the root cause, not the symptom”. On one level he naturally refers to the socio-economic circumstances of criminals, but residents (and potential victims) must also share in the responsibility.


He says; “the skips were put there for garden refuse, now we see that the people living near by put everything in, things that poor people will come looking for”.

Currently the police and the municipality liaise at a monthly meeting in which Plinga says he “is open to discussions to find solutions.”

However Captain Jafta says that while the police have approached the municipality about

improving lighting in these areas little has changed. In the municipality’s defence; while Makana has been awarded a R90 million Development Partnership Grant by the National Treasury “this grant is specifically meant for township/rural development...to redress the imbalances that were left by apartheid” and the municipality is currently focusing on lighting Raglan Road and beyond. Meanwhile attempts to increase visibility in open spaces such as Sugar Loaf Hill by getting rid of scrub and trees at the borders of the suburbs have been stopped due to the threat of erosion.

Evidently reclaiming our open spaces will continue to be a difficult process. While the police and municipality continue to work together to secure the fate of these homes we are left asking; where are the residents?



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Who is digging in your rubbish?



We see people digging through the rubbish bags every day. Often we don't see any further than that, turning our heads away, not facing the fact that their lives may depend on our rubbish. Tamsin Green, Stacy Moreland and Sarah Cohen look into the life of a rubbish digger.

A child's laugh echoes throughout the neighbourhood, a dog's bark resounds, and feet pound on the warming tar as people take to their early morning fitness routines. A mangy dog gnaws at litter strewn across Templeton Drive in Somerset Heights, and the rusty off-white Toyota I am driving doesn't quite fit into the scene. Piles of bulging black rubbish bags line the sides of the road, and continue to grow as gardeners and residents take to their working days.

I idle along, my skin taking in the morning sun, and in the shadows of the trees I see him. Hunched shoulders; a dark brown coat - Blending in to the shadows, it's hard to tell if its cotton is brown or if nature has simply taken its toll. As I get closer the figure clutches a black plastic bag in one hand, he walks on with a lop-sided stride and a make-shift walking stick in the other hand. The car rev's a little as I approach him and stop behind him; he does not flinch or look over his shoulder.

I watch for a bit.

His wrinkled hands untie bag after bag and he delves into the squalor; his paws no longer visible, his face immersed into the darkness of the plastic. He finds a milk carton, shakes its remains, pops the lid off, and tips his head back to quench his thirst. He flings the carton onto the road and continues his walk. As he walks along, I follow at a distance. At every stop, he puts something else into his bag.

Plastic cups.

Bread crusts.

A yogurt tub.

An old piece of cloth.

These wanderers who insist on helping themselves to what other's deem as rubbish are nothing new to the neighborhoods of Grahamstown. They often cause irritation, disturbance and mess. "Nobody wants to do this to survive. I see them eating old food out



of pure desperation,” says Mr. Webb from Oatlands North. Mr. Webb also expressed that although these “rubbish collectors” may not be criminals looking to steal goods, they may pass on valuable information to friends they talk to about the houses, the state of security and the people who live in these homes. “We only put our rubbish out after 11:30am when most of these wanderers have already gone past,” says Mr. Webb. Mr. Weaving, a Somerset Heights resident, said that his family experienced this problem for about a year before approaching the Makana Municipality. “We now wait for the rubbish truck and have organized for them to hoot and then we take our rubbish up; it normally works,” adds Mr. Weaving.

I step out into the warmth that summer brings and walk up to this rubbish collector. As I approach a cold feeling washes over me. A stranger and outsider to this area, but somewhere within me I still feel safe.

It doesn't take me long and I am in full conversation with this old man. Rugged, dirty and carrying a heavy smell, Nkosi, 68, tells me about his life. Moving to Grahamstown with his mom at 19, Nkosi worked as a gardener. His mom got violently ill and he stopped work to look after her. She soon died and Nkosi felt lost. “I have no money, I have no food. This is my only means of survival,” he tells me in broken English. Nkosi explains that people often shout at him for digging in the rubbish and he can understand their fears. “I know I look like I am up to trouble, is it a crime to dig through rubbish?” Nkosi struggles to understand resident's frustration and stresses he has no job, he has no family and this is all he knows.

Nkosi asks me if I would buy him a loaf of bread. I take him to Pick 'n Pay, buy him milk and a loaf of bread and ask him if I could drop him at home. As I sit in the car, his reddened eyes gleaming back at me as he rips the loaf up and stuffs pieces into his mouth, I realize what I have just asked. “Madam, you can drop me anywhere – the streets of Grahamstown are my home.”

Policing in Peril

There is much to be said on the subject of policing in South Africa. Some communities praise their efficiency and the speed at which they appear in times of peril, but neighbouring communities condemn them as “useless” due to understaffing and would rather call a private security company. Is there any hope of an improved channel of communication between Grahamstown communities and the police or was the divide set in stone many years ago? Stacy Moreland, Sarah Cohen and Tamsin Green investigate.

The truth is, improvements have been made since 1994, when the South African Police Force was subject to an image makeover and became the South African Police Service. The name wasn't the only article that was to change; the SAPS vowed to put aside gun practice for a while to become a more service orientated unit.

From then on the police were trained to be community policemen. Captain Green of the Grahamstown police recalls how the police service strove to improve their image by changing the colour of police vehicles from a solid blue so that they didn't come across as so 'menacing'.

By changing their image, the police hoped to appear to the public as approachable and involved, but some residents in Somerset Heights and surrounding suburbs protest that they are still waiting to see that change arrive at their door. Neil Webb, a Grahamstownian living in Somerset Heights feels he has experienced the opposite of community service from the police “I want to be able to talk to them and for them to take my statement correctly, but they are very unapproachable,” he reveals, adding that when he has called them on occasion, “nothing happens. They just don't arrive.”

When it comes to solutions, he doesn't have much faith in there being one. But how far does the service orientated approach to policing actually go?

Advocate Trish Armstrong, Chief of Nelson Mandela Bay Metro Police believes that if the community and police actively work together you can really make an impact on crime.

Advocate Armstrong was a director responsible for operational workings between the police and public in Ekurhuleni, formerly know as East Rand, and she paints a different picture of where policing stops and where the community needs to step in. “Police do not attend to the social aspect of crime. They are a service, but not a social service” she says, “They cannot be your mother and your psychologist too”.


Her solution for fighting crime is simply that the community should help the police in areas where they cannot help themselves. Her solution is rational in theory, but what the community needs to have proven is if it's successful in practice.

“A community and police forum is the most important way to improve the relationship” says Inspector Milanda Coetzer, a Crime Intelligence Official in Grahamstown.

The Community Police Forum in Grahamstown offers residents and police the opportunity to meet and discuss concerns as well as make suggestions, yet conflict exists surrounding whether the suggestions of the community are taken seriously enough to be put into action. Neil Webb, whose wife was in the forum for two years, expressed frustration that problems are brought up time and time again yet there is no follow-up, while Tariq Hayat of Curry Park has a conflicting opinion. Hayat is currently an active member in the police forum and sees there to be “no problems,” concluding that “they do cooperate”.

Whether or not people disapprove of the SAPS, it is safe to say that they are a necessity.

Lackluster communication has led to a fractured relationship between



The community should be “the eyes and ears” of the police

some of the citizens of Grahamstown and the local police and a middle ground must be established.

Dave Robertson of Oatlands North sees a solution within the community itself and urges the community to communicate better with each other. “A lot of people don’t know who their neighbours are and the criminals are clever, they know this”, he says. Robertson believes that just having a good relationship with your neighbours is a step towards fighting and preventing crime. “It is as simple as phoning your neighbour if you hear his alarm going off or if you see someone suspicious in the area”.

Captain Green backs up Robertson’s solution adding that the community should be “the eyes and ears” of the police.

While many of the residents in Somerset Heights and Oatland North are taking security into their own hands, they cannot ultimately fight crime with high walls and intimidating dogs.

The police forum represents a practical middle ground where Grahamstown residents who are unsatisfied with police services can voice their opinions directly and where solutions can be born.

The Community Service Centre of the Police Station has a suggestion box where anyone can voice their concerns. It would be a fine accomplishment for the relationship between police and public to go beyond reporting crime and move towards preventing crime together.

Who can you talk to?

Sector Managers of your community:

Captain Havanga – Detective

Super Intendant Du Plooi – Visible Policing

24 hour Police service: 10111

Working hours: 6039111

How High Are They Prepared To Jump?

Stacy Moreland, Sarah Cohen and Tamsin Green bring you some tips to safeguard your home

Where have the days gone where you could leave your front door wide open, be carefree and not worry about your home being broken into?

With crime on the rise in South Africa, residents no longer have time to point fingers, but can only safeguard themselves against criminal activities by living behind walls of fear.

Residents have gone to extreme measures to safeguard their homes, but the police also have valuable information that individuals may wish to follow to avoid crime in their communities. Milanda Coetzer, Crime Intelligence Official for Grahamstown, stresses that unfortunately Grahamstown is known for getting broken into when people are at home, and says that one should be aware when home during the day.

As a home owner, the South African Police Services feel that you are partly responsible for safeguarding your home, your premises and yourself, and, have thus come up with a set of ideas one could use and put into place to feel more secure.

"One must work from the outer border of the premises and gradually work to the middle of the house. The most vulnerable areas in the safeguarding of the home can, in the process, be identified," the report says.

The SAPS suggest that it is helpful to link fences up to alarm systems. Suggestions include investing in sturdy gates and that by fencing off your premises you are limiting free entrance onto the grounds. Mister Weaving, a Somerset Heights resident felt that individuals need to make their homes as difficult as possible to enter, especially the garden areas. "One should ensure that there is no easy access into the house – don't leave windows open," says Weaving.

Neil Webb from Oatlands North relies on his two dogs for protection. "I don't want to live with wire around me, nobody does," says Webb. Amongst the safeguarding measures the SAPS feel that lighting is one of the most important and effective ways to combat housebreaking and armed robbery and suggest that outside lights are useful and can be safeguarded by putting mesh over them in order to prevent them from being broken by stones.

The SAPS warn that technology has not stood still, especially when you look at the criminal realm, and maintain that in order to successfully safeguard a home, the best technology should be used.

The report also includes that community members should be aware of the roof as a weak spot in that it is difficult for police patrols to see a housebreaker if he is on the roof. "Avoid any structures



like walls and trees, which can help the potential housebreaker to get onto the roof.”

Security measures include burglar bars, alarm systems in unusual places and even the idea that you can link an alarm system directly to the police station.

Although there are those who feel unsettled, unsafe and insecure at times, it is important to remember that there is hope somewhere. “We feel safe in our community. We’ve called the police before and they have responded immediately,” says Katy Plaatjies, resident of Currie Park.

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The ps

Maybe a curious shadow sweeps across the window. Maybe a peculiar noise echoes in the dark. At night our subconscious minds are left to wonder "What if?" while an endless newsreel of South Africa's latest crime statistics plays relentlessly in our heads. Clearly how safe we are has nothing to do with how safe we feel.

Deon Bovey, has lived in Oatland's North for two years, says; "this is modern life, a Neighbourhood Watch could work, but everyone keeps too much to themselves, that's just the way it is". We have retreated to our domestic fortresses where varying levels of paranoia incite us to build higher walls around our families, leaving our neighbours to do the same.

The need to insulate ourselves against a crime-caused fear has little to do with a reduction in actual criminal activity. The South African Stress and Health Survey found in 2008 that a third of our population will experience some form of violence in our lifetime. However Samantha Fox, who is currently completing her Masters in Counselling Psychology specialising in trauma counselling, says that we can all suffer from "vicarious victimisation". We live immersed in negative media, horrifying statistics and gruesome images. In this environment empathy often makes us feel subconsciously victimised even when we ourselves are not the victims of crime. Without our knowledge we adopt a state of hyper-vigilance, ready to respond instinctively by 'fight or flight'. Simply; we live in fear.

Neighbours Wayne Rathbone and Richard MacNally live metres apart, yet they adopt very different approaches to the fear of potential attack. But both are certain that they feel absolutely safe and secure. Evidently 'safety' is as much a state of mind as a reality.

The Rathbones adopt a free-spirited approach;

psychology of fear

"we've been known to go to sleep with our keys still in the outside of our front door". The minor incidents of theft they've experienced they attribute to their own carelessness, such as the loss of a ladder left in the front yard or entry via a window left wide open to allow newly varnished floors to dry. "The location," they say, "that's where the real crime is".

While the Rathbone's relaxed attitude keeps them feeling secure Richard MacNally has reacted to threats by intruder-proofing his property, even throwing the odd firecracker to scare off "kids messing around". The MacNallys feel safe because they are actively protecting themselves. "I manage our security here... we've been here for 6 years now and not one problem".

Our homes should be places of refuge, where we can recuperate from the stresses beyond their walls. Yet despite our best attempts to protect ourselves we cannot always be successful. In June this year Ann Pott's 17 year old daughter was mugged.

In her wallet was her home address and (coincidentally?) since then their family home in Espin Drive has been targeted by criminals on numerous occasions. Random violent acts such as a brick thrown through window have left the family living in constant fear. "I think they have a personal vendetta against us," says Ann. Her 13 year old daughter has become so traumatised by the constant fear that she cannot fall asleep without her mother watching over her every night.

Stress is a natural response – an evolutionary tool that gives us the adrenaline rush required to evade, fight and survive. But are bodies and

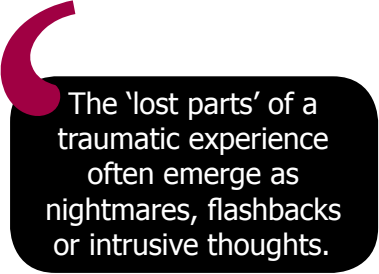
minds cannot cope with constant stress and the repercussions of post-traumatic stress should not be underestimated. Samantha Fox says that while Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is fairly rare everyone experiences some of the symptoms of PTSD when faced with violence in their own homes. She likens the human memory to a cupboard; "when you have a traumatic experience, that memory is just thrown into the cupboard, you don't have time to order and arrange it, parts might get lost". The 'lost parts' of a traumatic experience often emerge as nightmares, flashbacks or intrusive thoughts.

Every individual is different but difficulty concentrating, irritability, disturbed sleep and emotional 'numbness' may all be signs that a friend or family member is not coping with their traumatic experience.

When faced with a situation like this Samantha suggests that the most important

thing is to "create an environment of social support - where adults can talk it out and children can play it out". Parents should consider making a visible reassuring change to the security in or around their home. Children don't necessarily need to feel that their house is impenetrable, but rather a sense of "that was then, this is now" which allows them to 'let go' of traumatic memories.

Clearly neighbours aren't just the people who live on either side of us and home isn't only behind our garden gate. 'Living in fear' is a phenomenon which shows that when crime touches one of us, it affects all of us.



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'Living in Fear' is a project undertaken in conjunction with the Journalism and Media Studies department at Rhodes University, as part of a larger Civic Journalism project.

Through the use of various media products produced in print and broadcast, we aim to bring the community into closer contact to try to reduce crime levels by decreasing apathy between neighbours, as well as helping to facilitate a stronger police/community bond.

Thank-you so much to everyone who helped us in this endeavour and participated in any way.

Visit our blog on www.journalismcrime.blogspot.com or email us on livinginfearcmp@gmail.com



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