

MURDER SHE WROTE

by Mike Harris

The title brings up the Lansbury novel and T.V. series. I am not going that route. I am drawing a fine line between addressing the subject title and potpourri. Using one word of the title to write at a tangent because of the way my mind works. It is not about the author or her writings, instead her use of the word "murder" which triggered different thoughts than about her writings or T.V. shows. The word "MURDER" for me conjures up mostly uncontrollable rage and society's response to murder. An eye for an eye, etc., vested in the biblical classic response.

Most people get frustrated at some time or other. Women probably more than men. My reasoning is that until recently, our social structure was such that men were more able to socialize in their daily lives, at work or even at play. They had more outlets for their frustrations. Women however were more restricted, either stay at home mom's or usually employed in white collar jobs, which are in a way also restrictive since they had to be extra careful in their deportment and the image they projected.

While one's frustrations did not usually lead to murder I could well imagine that the thought might be present more often than not. In most families where the man was the sole wage earner it often led to monetary control, which is frustrating in a close relationship. Also with the worries of family rearing of young ones plus the constant problems of cooking and house management on usually a miserly allowance from the male money manager and a lack of education most times could and did compound the daily life of the female in the family unit.

I come from an unusual background. While I was definitely taught right from wrong, the street taught a different lesson, 'THE REAL WRONG WAS GETTING CAUGHT.' This made for mischief, which my father was always on the lookout for, which in turn made a very canny young boy. Mostly the mischief was harmless. My father always alert, caught me most of the time. Never one to beat smaller defenseless, inferiors the punishment always was a stern lecture and retribution, extra work and denial of some important pleasure. Capital punishment my father always maintained did not achieve the results it was supposed to. Murder in payment for murder did not work. Two wrongs did not make a right. His view was that the first murder demanded retribution. The harm done had to be paid for by the perpetrator not by taking his life, but by making the perpetrator take the burden of the wronged individual who was not now able fulfill his obligations due to having been murdered. When I asked how, my father admitted he really did not know, but there had to be smarter people than he who could come up with the answer. This left a large hole in his thinking. Being young I did not ponder the question and just left the thought lay there.

My personal conflict was more pressing. Right and wrong as my father taught or survival on the street, "wrong because you got caught." Lots of leeway and two concepts miles apart. Most important SURVIVAL addressing that it was evident the smart thing was not to get into a situation that would call for a decision. So "do not do wrong to start with." Good decision. So far it worked. What happens when in spite of all of one's good intentions one is drawn into a situation that is not one's fault or doing? Does "survival" trump all? I really have no answer but always in the back of my mind is the knowledge acquired by a very canny boy.