

Criminal Minds

By Marilyn Reeves

The other night I saw a fascinating story on the Evening News. For more than a decade the former principal and vice-principal of St. James Catholic School in Torrance, California had been absconding with the school funds ... to the tune of roughly a half million dollars. And those two wholesome looking women just happened to be nuns! It seems Sister Mary Margaret Kreuper and Sister Lana Chang had acquired a taste for expensive vacations and gambling.

The News also reported that some folks have been installing special doorbell buttons that take pictures of the Holiday 'Porch Pirates' who help themselves to other people's deliveries without even knowing the contents of the packages. And they showed one desperado who goes around stealing the doorbell buttons – perhaps to help out his fellow thieves.

Nothing much surprises me anymore, except the lengths some people go to pursue their nefarious criminal activity. Aside from the ongoing problem involving gang bangers and drug dealers which is a world unto itself, I wonder what happens to an ordinary person to make them want to steal from others. Is it poverty? Envy or maliciousness? A sense of entitlement? Or is it simply the thrill of thinking they're getting away with something.

Unlike Jean Val Jean in *Les Miserables* who was sent to prison for stealing a loaf of bread to feed his family, the majority of shoplifters aren't necessarily poor. They often don't need – or even want – the items they pocket. They simply get a rush, a sense of empowerment, when they snatch something. Unless they happen to get caught!

I always thought people were born with a conscience. Whether or not they ever set foot inside a church or synagogue, I thought everyone had an inner sense of right or wrong. At least the people I know and associate with. But if there's one thing that does shock me, it's the sheer number of people, world-wide, who feel justified in stealing from others.

Whether it's the recorded monotone voice on your telephone threatening to have you arrested if you don't send them a check to cover your supposed Social Security overpayment, or the spies on the Internet who follow your every move trying to discover the key to your on-line bank account or credit card number, or the woman who will snatch your purse from your grocery cart when your back is turned ... you have to constantly beware nowadays of all those pernicious criminal minds just waiting to take what's yours.

It almost seems as if everyone out there is dishonest – except for me and thee, of course. We are constantly reminded to be alert! Be on guard! You just can't be too careful these days! It can make a person paranoid if you let it.

Is this just a symptom of the times, or is honesty – like courtesy – rapidly becoming another lost art?