

A Drug Problem Right In Our Own Backyard

(Fourth of Five Articles)

By Peter R. Walls
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More than ever, minors—as young as 12 and 13 are running away from home.

And they stay away from home — often because they now have a place to go, or at least a place to stay.

Many times those places are where the members of the so-called "drug culture" live — Haight Ashbury, Berkeley, and, heaven forbid, Ben Lomond.

Santa Cruz County can hardly boast it has escaped the influences of drugs among the young. It is not only the "outside agitator" who has run-ins with law enforcement agencies.

Eighty-five per cent of the residents of the Rev. Gene Dawson's Drug Abuse Preventive Center in the old wing of General Hospital, come from the Santa Cruz area.

A number of kids have run away no farther than Ben Lomond or some other "idyllic" area in the hills. There they find, through the "underground telegraph" system, a place to stay. Somebody always knows where one can drop one's head if one is passing through, or even planning to stay awhile.

The influx of the "drop out" to the hills tempts the unhappy teenager to join them in their despair, even though the teenager may not be as unhappy as he thinks he is, nor as prone to experimentation. Not many runaways stay "with" the drug scene very long, nor are many young "in" it at all.

This immigration has upset the "straight" residents of the San Lorenzo Valley who tire of what they see as a disturbance of their traditional way of life.

The problem of coping with the friction between young and old, between "them" and "us" was formalized last fall with the establishment of a county-wide committee that has a number of names—indicating the scope of the problem and the difficulty in defining it, as well as the ends the group has in mind.

Known variously as the Committee to Control the Anti-Social Element in the County, or if you wish, the Committee to Control the Transient Element in the County, the group of government officials and private citizens seeks to do three things:

- Condemn substandard housing in which many of the "drug culture" people live.

- Encourage a vigorous law enforcement.

- Emphasize drug education in the schools.

Only the last point is easy to implement, however.

Selective condemnation of substandard housing, of which there is plenty in the county, would violate the civil rights of the residents and probably

wouldn't solve the problem, said Arthur Alexander, assistant to the county administrative officer.

"It would make it more difficult for them to stay in the area, but it wouldn't stop them. It would just disperse them more," he said.

Some substandard dwellings, in addition, house pensioners who can't afford other accommodations. Consequently, the committee is recommending that the Board of Supervisors vote condemnation on "major violators" of building codes, a slow, hesitant process.

But even if building codes are enforced only with caution, law enforcement is even stickier. A staggering number of persons could be arrested if law enforcement agencies had the manpower to do so.

But their power to arrest persons, manpower aside, has been hampered by court decision which one detective said makes agents "arrest weary."

Sheriff's Sgt. James Marston said so many cases are being thrown out of court for improper procedures that officers sometimes have second thoughts about arresting drug law breakers.

Supreme Court decisions regarding the rights of suspects and stiffer interpretations of search and seizure provisions of the Constitution serve to hamper arrest procedures. Much more pre-arrest investigation must go into a case before the actual "bust" is made, Marston said. The manpower problem alone makes coping with drug abuse impossible.

Richard Verbrugge, assistant district attorney, noted, however, that not (marijuana) use in particular was not so much the target of his office as is selling and transportation.

He did not think the search and seizure restrictions were invalid. "People should be free from police harassment in their own home. The purpose is not to persecute them, but to help them through the courts."

The biggest drug abuse problem now is "speed" use, which Verbrugge described as the "poor man's cocaine."

In years past, the drug problem was narcotics and involved the "criminal element."

"But that's not true anymore," Verbrugge said. "There's an intellectual class of people experimenting with drugs."

When a juvenile is picked up for possession, or smoking, or being in a place where marijuana is being used, the disposition of the case takes several twists, depending on its nature.

Most first offenders are counseled either by police or by the Probation Department, warned of the dangers, both legal and personal, and released to the

custody of their parents.

Of course, if a young person has a sizeable lot of pot on him, or he has a prior record with agencies, he is usually referred directly to the probation department which by law must hear all juvenile cases.

In 1968, 2630 cases were referred to the probation department, a drop from 2819 the year previously, a figure which Ed Crowell, deputy chief probation officer, hoped was due to the success in educating teenagers.

In February, of the 203 referrals from all sources—police, schools and parents—four involved hard narcotics, 10 marijuana, and two lesser offenses such as glue sniffing.

Only the most serious cases ever get to the juvenile judge. Informal arrangements between parents and the probation officers is much preferred.

"When the legislature gave judges the discretion to make marijuana possession a felony or a misdemeanor, they took a step in the right direction," said Crowell, noting the widespread use by experimenting youth of a drug which certainly has not the physical or emotional dangers of hard narcotics.

Superior Court Judge Charles Franich thought this discretion didn't make that much difference, since most judges are prone to giving first offenders probation anyway. "It looks better on the record, however, to have a misdemeanor and not a felony," the judge said.

He urged parents to learn about drug use. "Parental knowledge is the greatest preventive," he said.

Social Security Benefit Increase Is Under Study

Washington (AP). — Administration sources said today proposals to increase Social Security benefits are under active study and they hinted it might be possible to boost benefits without raising payroll taxes.

These sources emphasized that a wide range of suggestions for higher Social Security benefits were being considered but that no final decision had been made on a package to be presented to Congress.

At this point, they said, there was no guarantee President Nixon would seek higher benefit payments although such a move is widely expected.

In the past, requests for increased benefits usually have gone hand in hand with calls for higher Social Security taxes levied against workers and employers to finance the program.

However, one White House source who has been involved in some of the discussion said he had heard no talk about boosting these taxes in advance of 1971, when an increase already is scheduled to take effect under a law enacted during the Lyndon B. Johnson administration. This source said the Social Security trust fund, out of which benefits are paid, is in healthy shape — thus suggesting Nixon might propose higher benefits to take effect next year without calling at the same time for higher payroll taxes.

VIETNAM ASSIGNMENT



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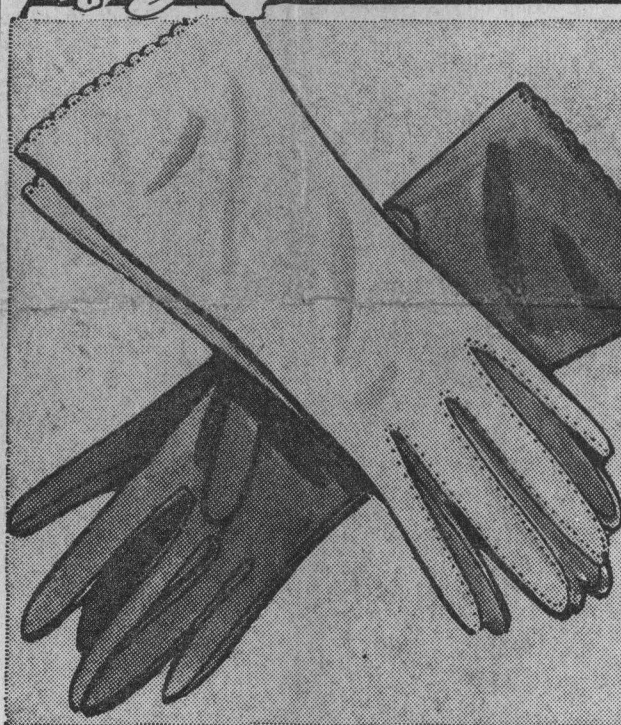
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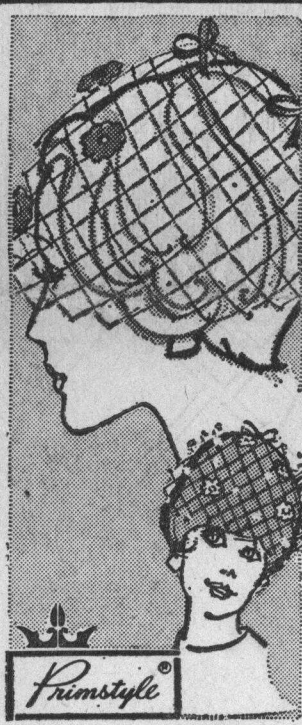
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