

The Gadfly police log

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing October 19, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts in the wake of the George Floyd murder* 

So, yes, there's a little matter of a pandemic.

So, yes, there's a little matter of a presidential election.

But Gadfly prefers to keep his focus narrowly local, where, as he has often said, he has hopes that a community feeling will act as a kind of adhesive bond as we discuss tough issues.

And, so, Gadfly is focusing on what is or should be our local response to public safety in the wake of the George Floyd murder.

We had a 6hr. Public Safety Committee meeting August 11. The police reported. Public interest was high. 27 people called in. 37 viewers stayed till the end. There were 237 YouTube views in total.

Then there were City Council meetings August 18, September 1, September 15, and October 6.

And we have heard nothing further.

But Gadfly has been preparing as if we are going to hear something, maybe discuss something.

And so he just spent 7 posts slow-walking through a presentation by a Minneapolis activist at the NCC "Peace and Social Justice" conference who is engaged in promoting the abolition of the police in his town.

An extreme position.

Gadfly is glad to understand that position more now.

But before he comments, he'd like to go back to where he started this abolition thread and consider his own personal interactions with the police. How did they turn out? Can he imagine an alternative to the police? Can he imagine a need for an alternative to the police?

He asked you to think about your own interactions with the police. (He'd especially like to hear about traffic stops.)

See how you feel now after hearing the abolitionist make his case.

Remember the question he asked us to think about, "whom do you call first?"

Here are some entries in the Gadfly police log (what's in yours?):

- called police because Mrs. Gadfly had fallen, and he needed help: Mrs. G wasn't hurt, but she couldn't get up. She has spine and shoulder issues, so the possibility of aggravating injury was on his mind. It was nearly midnight. Gadfly could have called a friendly neighbor even though he was asleep, but, worried about aggravating injury, he felt he needed someone "professional." Gadfly's immediate thought was to call the police. Two jovial officers arrived, remarking at how many calls like this they get. They expertly applied a maneuver utilizing a blanket (who knew), and Mrs. G was upright in no time. In calling the police, Gadfly remembers thinking that they would probably refer the call or refer me somewhere else. But police seemed to be natural "first contact."
- called because College students 3 houses away were partying outside and playing loud music: Gadfly had 6 children, boys, clustered compactly in age, Irish sextuplets. They were like a wolfpack. They made noise. Plenty of it. You'd think Gadfly would be tolerant. But he got old. And cranky. And he's pissed that his neighborhood is changing, turning into rentals. Bringing less care to property upkeep. Bringing parking problems. So there's tension between him and the students. He didn't relish approaching 15-20 inebriated college students. Calling the police was his immediate reaction. Two officers arrived. They "sauntered" (carefully chosen SAT word, look it up) in a non-threatening manner into the yard party, and it quickly dialed down. The officers reported back to me that the City noise ordinance didn't kick in for 3hrs, but that they got the students to agree to dampen the noise by shutting off the outside music. Nice work.
- called because a neighbor had a derelict vehicle parked for weeks on our residential street: friendly, non-confrontational, neighborly banter elicited promises to move the vehicle, but there were always

excuses. Issuance of a ticket by a pretty serious imposing no-bullshit looking dude officer on a motorcycle immediately did the trick. Gadfly doesn't remember thinking there was any other way to deal with this than call the police.

- called because a rabid cat had gotten into the cellar: well, we didn't know it was rabid at first. It was just up in the rafters and hissed rather ferociously at attempts to get to it. The kids were scared. Gadfly isn't sure that he even knew that there might be something called animal control, etc., for something like this, so he called the police. One officer arrived. He said the cat was foaming and obviously rabid. Only one thing to do. He shot the cat and disposed of it, who knows where.
- called because of "domestic disturbances" at a neighbor's: Had to do this a couple times. A neighbor family sometimes gets into a gnarl. Loud, so loud that it becomes intolerable if it lasts a long time. And intense, serious, the kind of interaction in which you damn well expect eventual violence. So Gadfly has had to call the police. He is always asked if there are guns in the neighbor's house. There are, and he says so. Multiple officers arrive, unbeknownst to the neighbors. One circles the house, checking things out. Another knocks on the door, firmly but not especially aggressively. The other officer or officers stand pretty relaxed a distance away. The main officer seems to identify the antagonists pretty quickly, and they voluntarily separate without force, going off to tell their "story" at a distance from each other to one of the officers. The officers hear them out. Gradually things calm down. At times the officers have provided guidance or legal direction about the sources of the arguments. Each of these domestic disturbances has ended well.

That's a look at Gadfly's tame life with the police.

Which is why his instinct was immediately antithetical to the idea of abolition but, as well, simultaneously intensely curious about how the case is made.

Would you want to share an example from your police log? Gadfly knows there must be a world of varied experience. He will publish anonymously, if you prefer, as long as he knows who you are and trusts you.

The idea is to think what life would be like without the police.