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Analytical Writing

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IS BUFFALO REALLY THE "CITY OF GOOD NEIGHBORS"?

One of the well-known nicknames for the city of Buffalo is "The City of Good Neighbors." For anyone looking to move to this area, or even just visit, the nickname may give the pretence that it's one big, happy community. Is this the case in Buffalo? While any given city has its share of problems, the statistics for Buffalo are alarming. According to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports Preliminary Annual Report, violent crimes in Buffalo have risen since 2004 from 3,804 to 3,908 in 2005. Among those statistics, robbery and burglary (considered the less violent form of robbery) have seen their rates shoot from 1,485 and 3,914 to 1,667 and 4,240 respectively ("Table 4" 1). These statistics, according to H. McCarthy Gipson, Buffalo's Police Commissioner, are "a reflection of the state of our society" (qtd. in Pignataro, "Violent Crimes" B1). The elderly population appears to be a target of robberies and burglaries in the Buffalo Area.

South Buffalo resident Edward Torraca, 82, is one of the elderly being targeted for crime in the Buffalo area. Mr. Torraca became a victim on August 17, 2006 when he let a young man and his friend in "for a glass of water" (qtd. in Pignataro, "Hired Helper" D3). He had no reason to believe that anything out of the ordinary would occur because one of the young men, Quinn Lewis, had taken care of snow removal at his house for three years. Lewis, 19, entered the home with his accomplice Roger Edmonds, 20, and became violent. According to Mr. Torraca, using his own ties and belts, "[Lewis] pushed me down and then he tied up my leg [and he and Edmonds] tied my legs, my arms, my

mouth" (D3). Once he was tied securely, the young men began to demand money and rifle through his bedrooms. Not satisfied with what they found, the young men forced Mr. Torraca to divulge the combination to his safe from which the men stole \$960. According to police, once the combination was obtained, the two men shoved electrical tape into Mr. Torraca's mouth and taped it shut. They left their victim bound and gagged, ripped the phone cords out of the wall, and fled the scene. According to the *Buffalo News*, the two men were charged with robbery, burglary, felony assault, unlawful imprisonment, and criminal mischief after police obtained Lewis's cell phone number leading to his location and subsequent arrest (D3). Luckily, Mr. Torraca suffered only minor injuries from his ordeal.

Unlike the case of Mr. Torraca, robbery attempts do not always occur in the home as is evident by the events that occurred at a social club for senior citizens. Two armed and masked teens entered the club where a group of members were playing cards. The teens demanded money and fired a warning shot from a shotgun. One member of the card game fell to the floor after the warning shot, leaving another member to believe he had been hit. Upon seeing his friend hit the floor, the other member, a 64 year old man who remains unnamed, drew his own weapon and returned fire on the robbers. His bullet fatally hit one of the young men causing the shotgun to go off again injuring the other robber, Zontail Warren, 16, in the arm. Warren fled the scene and was taken to ECMC after he flagged down a passerby. While the member of the club was not charged because his actions were in self-defense, Warren was charged with first-degree robbery and criminal possession of a weapon (Rey B1). Luckily, none of the members of the social club were injured during this attempted robbery.

Not all attempted robberies and burglaries are violent like the social club example, but what may be even more disturbing is when a respected member of society helps target the elderly for crime in the Buffalo area. Buffalo Fire Lt. Ricardo Olivieri, 44, pled guilty to the charge of attempted grand larceny. Mr. Olivieri helped John Regan, 36, and William Verney, 25, both addicted to heroin, con almost \$30,000 from an elderly man in Elma. Mr. Olivieri would pose as their lawyer as the two men approached the unnamed victim, a family friend of the Verney's, for money. Capt. Timothy Murphy from the Lancaster Police Department reports, "These two would go to him and say they needed fine money and money to get bailed out from being arrested" (qtd. in Cardinale D6). The victims bank notified police when he repeatedly made large withdraws. After one withdrawal where the police were notified, they arrived at the bank and arrested both Verney and Regan. who were waiting in the parking lot. Both men cooperated with police and implicated Mr. Olivieri as their accomplice. All three men are to pay restitution to the victim and face further sentencing for their crimes (D6). The most alarming fact of this story is that the elderly victim, while unharmed, became a target for burglary by a trusted member of society.

Mr. Torraca, the social club for senior citizens, and the elderly man scammed with the assistance of a Buffalo fire lieutenant are all unfortunate examples of crimes, violent or not, targeting the elderly population in the Buffalo area. While the nickname "City of Good Neighbors" may seem endearing, the true nature of the city lies within its statistics. The increase of incidences of violent robberies and burglaries committed in the Buffalo area has increased, further taking away from the area's reputation. For the elderly population, an apparent target for crime, the reasons for the increase are hardly sufficient.

The problem has escalated from home intrusions to social clubs. These victims can be anywhere and become a target. Buffalo Police Commissioner Gipson stated, "It's people not having a lot to occupy themselves with and with employment being down. We have a lot of people out there with not a lot to do" (qtd. in Pignataro, "Hired Helper" D3). For the elderly population in the Buffalo area, recognizing there is an issue with violent crimes and burglaries on the rise is a beginning, but by no means the end to the problem. In fact, it may seem that they are surrounded by everything but "good neighbors."

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