

Salem News You Don't Get in *The Salem News*

Senior Citizen Accosted by Two Homeless Men on Endicott Street

On the evening of May 14, Thomas Camarda, 68, was physically accosted by two homeless men in front of his Endicott Street home. While the event was more physically unnerving than others in our neighborhood, the basic scenario — involving drugs, excessive noise, and an escalation to violence — is one that we in GESNA have all too often witnessed. I interviewed Mr. Camarda to hear his story in his own words.

— *Joanne Mattera*

JM: Tom, the attack on you required police intervention. Would you tell us what led up to the event?

TC: Two homeless individuals, a woman and a man, had been living in a vehicle in front of the Christopher Columbus Club across the street from my house. They had been there for a month, only occasionally moving their car. They were doing drugs in the car and using the social club as both a trash receptacle and a latrine (going behind the building, toilet paper in hand, to relieve themselves). Periodically I would see them hide something under the car. I don't know about you, but to me that says "drugs." Police were called multiple times not only by me but by several of my neighbors.

JM: Why did you call the police multiple times?

TC: These folks were constantly fighting and screaming at one another, slamming their car doors, breaking bottles. It was a nuisance. About a week before the incident, the man, under the influence of something, lay down in the middle of the street and wouldn't move. We called the police.

On the evening of the altercation, my son and I were putting out the trash barrels. The man who lived in the car, joined by a friend of his, began to yell at me and my son: "Now I know where you live!" He

smashed a liquor bottle and then moved toward us. As he put his hands on me, he said he was going to "f—k" me up and hurt my son. He also shouted, "I know where your daughter lives!" This was a direct threat to me and my family. My grandkids were home. I was not going to let them get into my house,

JM: How did the situation escalate?

TC: These two men were yelling obscenities thinking that we were the ones calling police on them. (We were, but so were the neighbors.) The guy who had been living in the car charged at me and tried to hit me. A neighbor, who had been watching everything unfold, stepped in and moved him out of the way. The other guy, considerably taller and younger than me, advanced and put his hands on me. To protect myself, I punched him causing him to fall back. My son, who is well versed in self-defense, grabbed me to deescalate the situation.

JM: Who called the police while this was going on?

TC: This time it was the neighbors who called as they saw the scene unfold. I think these guys were more riled than usual because the same day, at 6:00 am, neighbors had been woken up by their screaming and

called the police. Perhaps these guys thought I was the one who had called in the morning.

JM: That evening the police arrested them.

TC: Yes. At least six police cars showed up. The police report notes that six officers, each in a cruiser, “were dispatched, due to the number of 911 calls received.” Both men were arrested for disorderly conduct and assault. Turns out that the guy living in the car had done time for bank robbery. His friend, the taller one who came after me, is a convicted arsonist. They gave their address as Lifebridge. They were not allowed to live at the shelter — which is why one of the men was living in his car — but they took meals at the shelter.

One of the police officers berated me. “They have rights, too,” he said. I was taken aback. I understand they have rights. But we have the right to peace and safety in our neighborhoods and homes. This officer seems to have been an outlier, because we had been told by the police to call them when there was an issue so there could be a paper trail. This is what my neighbors and I do.

JM: Have you spoken to Jason Etheridge, the director of the shelter, or anyone there?

TC: No. Lifebridge assumes no responsibility for any of its clients. It would have been a waste of my time. That’s why we have to call the police.

JM: Have you seen these men since the event?

TC: The car was towed, and I have not seen either man.

JM: Do you feel you, your family, or your home are in danger?

We have an order of protection, but you never know. These guys were high on alcohol and drugs. We’re on high alert. It’s a terrible way to live. It shouldn’t be like this. I have been active in my community as a school volunteer and Boy Scout leader. My family has lived in Salem for five generations. The situation here has gotten very bad.

Note: You did not read this story in *The Salem News*. There are many similar events involving acts of violence by unhoused people against Salem citizens, or against one another, which are not reported by the press. While it is the right of any news outlet to report selectively, omission of neighborhood incidents — particularly of theft, violence, and rape, and of resulting police action and arrests — leave the general public unaware of the extent of these incidents. You have a right to know. According to *A Guide to the Massachusetts Public Records Law*, “Every government record in Massachusetts is presumed to be public unless it may be withheld under a specifically stated exemption.” This means you or any citizen can request to see a city’s police records.

A PDF of the Massachusetts Public Records Law can be downloaded here:

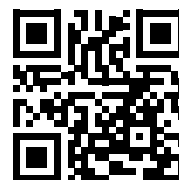
<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/divisions/public-records/download/guide.pdf>

To request Salem Police Department Public Records: <https://www.salemma.gov/salem-police-department/contact-us/pages/police-department-public-records-requests>

— *Joanne Mattera*
Resident,
Greater Endicott Street Neighborhood Association
July 2024

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