

In the Fresno Bee, Aug 11, there was an article about an FSU athlete who had been involved in a fight which included "biting off part of another man's lip." A Deputy District Attorney said "the charge, a felony, carries a potential penalty of two to eight years." Defense attorney, Barry Rekoon, was quoted saying "he would like to dispose of the mayhem charge without a trial and will ask the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program to arrange a meeting between his client and the alleged victim..." The Bee reporter then added, "Such sessions can lead to a reduction of criminal charges and a reduction in the severity of the sentence."

As of this writing, this case has not been referred, but it seems like a good occasion to help us examine our paradigms of justice.

What do you think? Is the purpose of justice retribution or restoration (of victim, offender, and community)? Is VORP an easy way out or is VORP real accountability? The follow-up of the Bee reporter could have been, "Such sessions can lead to real accountability, restoration of victim and offender, while significantly increasing a sense of well-being in community and reducing community costs."

If the offender would choose to accept responsibility and work with VORP he would need to recognize, with the victim, the impact of what he did and the injustice and wrong in what he did. They would need to decide what would be needed to restore the loss. And they would need to decide about intentions for the future and come up with a follow-up procedure to convince the victim that he was sincere in not doing it again to him or anyone else.

If he is willing to be responsible, should he still spend time in prison? After all, he did violate the law. Or would it now be a waste of money to put him in prison, provided he completes his agreements which include not repeating the offense. Or would it maybe even be unwise to put him in prison since people usually become "more like those they are around?" Do we want him to become more like those at FSU or those at the Prison?

If you are a Christian, what do you think Jesus would want? Jesus said, "You have heard it said, 'an eye for an eye...' but I say to you..." Changing paradigms is not easy.

## Teenagers And New Homeowner Sign Contract After Successful Mediation

■ Our story this month is from Volunteer VORP Mediator, Tony Redfern, who is a member of the First Baptist Church in Kingsburg. Names and some details have been changed to protect the identities of the victim and offenders. There are now VORP Mediators in many of the smaller communities in Fresno County.

One night, two young men, Jeff and Barry, decided to literally "paint the town". With cans of spray paint they went on a graffiti spree. They chose highly visible walls and fences, especially areas that could be seen by someone who was coming into town from another area.

Fortunately, a concerned citizen of this small town saw Jeff and Barry. Since this was a small town and "everyone knows everybody", Jeff and Barry could be easily identified and their names were turned into the police. The case was referred to VORP.

One of the victims was a young single woman, Valerie, who had moved to town about a year ago. She was now a homeowner and was making it on her own and was very proud of her house. She came from a larger city because she wanted to get away from big city crime.

My individual meeting with Valerie was very intense. She was angry. She felt violated and robbed of her security. She did not want to let the boys off easy. She had concerns about her ability to be constructive during the joint meeting. She was afraid she might say the wrong thing that would make things worse and that they would do something else to her house. She wanted some time to think it over.

I met individually with Jeff and Barry. They both told their stories. Jeff was not as expressive as Barry but he was open to the VORP process. Barry was remorseful for what he did but vented his anger about the rich newcomers who were changing his small community. Both Jeff and Barry had a hard time making the connection between what they did and the fact that their actions actually hurt someone. When I told them that the victim was very afraid about meeting them, they were confused and shocked that anyone would be afraid of them.

A few weeks later, Valerie called me at my home and said she was about ready to meet with Jeff and Barry but she still had a few concerns. She wanted to meet at a neutral place and she chose a church. She was uneasy about the process and concerned about what she might say and if it could be helpful. We agreed to meet together before the joint meeting and role play the mediation process.

As planned, Valerie and I met at the church to rehearse the VORP process.

About 45 minutes later, Jeff and Barry arrived, each with one of their parents. Valerie said she was ready. Both boys told Valerie what they did and why.

Jeff said he did the graffiti just for fun, but Barry had a definite agenda. Barry grew up in this small town and wanted this town to remain a nice small town. He did not want the town to grow and he saw growth as something that would destroy the small town he had enjoyed through his childhood. Barry saw the newcomers as "rich people" ....

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who built large extravagant homes. (He lived in a modest, yet very nice home in an older part of town.) He felt put down and unimportant in a town where he had always felt important. After all, this town was his town. Barry felt a need to protect his town. He hoped if it looked scary outsiders wouldn't want to move in. Barry said he knew his method was definitely wrong and harmful.

Valerie, told how she felt when she found the graffiti and how it made her fearful and angry. It made her feel insecure about the future and now she looked at every teenager with suspicion and fear, wondering if they were the ones who had singled her out.

They both wanted to make sure that Valerie knew that she was not singled out, that they did not have anything against her and they had no intentions of hurting

her. They assured her that they would never do anything again to frighten or harm her.

Valerie suggested restitution could be made if she could be reimbursed for the paint to cover the graffiti and if it included enough money to buy a security motion light for her home. The boys (and parents) agreed. Valerie felt the light would make her feel a little more secure. She also said that if the boys fulfilled the agreement it would help restore her trust in them and in teenagers.

In contrast to the beginning of the meeting, there was small-talk and ease between them as I completed the written agreement. We signed it and as we left we all shook hands.

Tony Redfern, VORP Mediator

#### OUR COMMUNITIES NEED YOUR HELP!!!!!!

You could become a volunteer VORP Mediator. The next training sessions are scheduled for Oct 14 & 15 and Nov 15, 22, & 26. The fee is \$15 for those who plan to work with at least three cases. The training fee is \$75 for others. Call Laura or Kathy (291-1120) to Register. Participants report that the training is helpful in resolving conflict at home, school, church, and anywhere else you find yourself in community.

#### VORP RELIES ENTIRELY ON YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS!!

Monthly contributions of \$10 and \$20 and annual contributions of \$100 - \$500 are what sustain VORP.

### First Annual Art Benefit

Featuring

#### *An Enchanted Evening in Margaret Hudson's Backyard*

Date: October 15, 1994  
Time: 5:00 pm - 7:00 pm  
Location: 4247 N. Thorne Ave.  
Entertainment: Live Baroque Music  
Food: Gourmet Coffee  
provided by Krakatoa  
Coffee & Trading Co.  
Specialty Desserts  
Cost: \$15 donation per ticket

**Enter to win an original, signed  
Margaret Hudson sculpture!**



WATCH FOR YOUR TICKETS IN THE MAIL!!

Please join in the fun and purchase several \$15 tickets. This is an opportunity to support VORP while introducing your friends to VORP and having great fun in Margaret's backyard, Oct 15. More tickets mean your chances are greater to win the sculpture. You need not be present to win the drawing for the wonderful, one-of-a-kind, original Margaret Hudson sculpture. The image of the Lion and Lamb sculpture, peacefully together, is a wonderful way to symbolize the work of VORP.

Shalom

Ron Claassen

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