

Daily News: Wednesday, November 1, 1987. Re-printed by permission.

It takes more than a shot

Editorial

In Joe Grant's neighborhood, the "Just say no" slogan just doesn't work. So Grant took up arms: After witnessing what he thought was yet another drug deal going down in front of his Pacoima home Sunday, Grant says he unloaded a "warning shot" that grazed a woman he believed to be a pusher.

Many of Grant's law-abiding neighbors have rallied to his side, saying that police have failed to scare away the cocaine trade in the area. "The police come through at 35 mph, and the minute the taillight disappears they're back out - like roaches," said resident Jerry Carter.

As understandable as Grant's reaction may have been, however, drug enforcement properly belongs in the hands of the police, not with vigilantes whose amateur gunplay could turn the neighborhood into a combat zone. And if the police aren't effective, as seems to be the case, residents must channel their anger into organization - the kind of organization that can mobilize the community against crime as well as get the attention of city officials.

The shot Grant fired in anger has already resulted in extra patrols by the Los Angeles Police Department and a crime prevention pep talk by Sgt. Gary Merrifield of LAPD's Foothill Division. The added attention appears to have slowed the drug trafficking for the time being, but without sustained effort it will be all too easy for the dealers to come out of hiding again.

What does it take to turn a neighborhood around? Stepped-up police patrols obviously are part of the solution, but Merrifield believes it's just as important for residents to start taking pride in their surroundings, something he admits isn't easy in a high-crime area with large numbers of transients and where many of the old-timers have grown apathetic about drug trafficking.

Fortunately, there seems to be enough people fed up with crime in Grant's Montford Street neighborhood to give the area a chance. But it will take work. "There has to be continuous pressure, and the pressure has to come from organized residents," said David Mays, chief deputy to Los Angeles City Councilman Ernani Bernardi, Pacoima's councilman. "Without that, we're dead."

City and police officials stand ready to help residents form Neighborhood Watch groups and to assist in organizing special cleanup campaigns (targeting abandoned sofas or graffiti, for example) to instill a sense of pride in the community. But officials are far

more likely to respond to organized groups instead of isolated residents crying out in the wilderness.

Joe Grant's reaction to the constant parade of drug trafficking in front of his home could be a turning point for his neighborhood, but the price might be high; Grant faces the possibility of being charged with assault with a deadly weapon. Moreover, residents of the Montford Street area still will have to go through the time-consuming process of organizing a Neighborhood Watch or similar group if they expect to achieve any lasting results.

Instead of picking up a gun, Grant should have picked up the phone and called some of his neighbors. Changing the block for the better isn't a job for one man alone.

Daily News: September 30, 1988. Re-printed by permission.

Man found innocent in shooting of drug suspect

By Deirdre C. Phillips
Daily News Staff Writer

SAN FERNANDO - A Superior Court jury Thursday found a former Pacoima resident not guilty of assault in the shooting of a woman he suspected was selling crack cocaine in front of his home.

Joe C. Grant, 53, who now lives in the Santa Clarita Valley, was accused of using a semi-automatic pistol to shoot Lealetta Parks, 29, on Nov. 8, 1987. Grant, who was charged with assault with a deadly weapon, claims he was fed up with drug trafficking in his neighborhood and was trying to scare dealers away.

The jury deliberated about four hours and voted only once.

"I thought he was innocent all the way," said juror Joe Baez, adding that if faced with a similar situation he might have taken the same action.

As the verdict in the four-day trial was read to Judge Howard J. Schwab, Grant leaned slightly forward and shook hands with his attorney, James E. Blatt. Grant's wife, Jeanette, who was seated behind him, clasped her hands and smiled.

"I'm relieved," Grant said later. "I felt that, in the first place, if you are on drugs, go home with them - don't do them in front of my house."

Deputy District Attorney Harold S. Lynn left the courthouse after the verdict was announced without discussing the case.

His supervisor, Billy Webb, later said that the jury's decision did not amount to condoning acts of vigilantism. He said he believed jurors had carefully considered the facts of the Grant case.

"Had he seriously injured a person, the people of this community would not allow that to go unpunished," Webb said. "But it says the whole community has had enough of these drug dealers."

In a separate case, Parks was convicted in August of possession of controlled substances for sale.

Jurors said they did not believe Grant ever intended to shoot Parks.

"I couldn't find intent to do harm," said juror Denise Locker, 25, of Palmdale. "I think he meant to scare her. They didn't prove he meant to hurt her."

Grant testified that he was aiming over Parks' shoulder to scare her but that the bullet grazed her.

"It wasn't an easy decision," said jury foreman Richard Haley, 40, of Newhall. "We had to read the laws several times."

"I'm very grateful that everybody managed to see things from our point of view," Mrs. Grant said.

[[Home Page](#) | [Browse Articles](#) | [Contents](#) | [Feedback](#) | [Search](#)]