

## The day I became yet another crime statistic

**R**EADING about crime and violence in the newspapers is always an eye-opener, but it can never prepare you for the shock of becoming one of the statistics. In just one hour in January, my belief in my safe passage in my country, my city, my neighbourhood, on my very own street changed dramatically.

I live in Rondebosch East, a former white working class area which rapidly changed character when Group Areas Act restrictions were relaxed. The residents have never been particularly concerned about safety and there are no high fences, fierce dogs or rapid response security companies. I have never been much concerned about my personal safety because neither I nor anyone close to me has ever been a victim of crime. Now I am far more conscious of the dangers women face in our society.

It was the night before my son's first day at school. It was hot and I decided to pop into the cafe down the road for a Coke – a normal everyday activity. As I was getting back into my car, Coke in hand, a man put his foot in my car and said 'keep quiet, move over, I've got a gun'. At first I couldn't understand what he was saying, and he repeated his threat.

I moved over, and he got into the car. I started shaking and crying thinking that he was going to kill me. But at the same time it was unreal, as if it was not happening to me.

He told me that if I didn't do exactly what he said he would shoot me. He drove around the corner and picked up a friend, who was waiting for him. They asked if I had any bank cards on me. I offered them all my cards, begging them to let me out. They told me to keep quiet, saying they were taking me with them. The driver kept threatening to shoot me.

I then realised that they were very young and were obviously stoned and drunk. This made me a little calmer and I felt that I needed to take control of the situation. I told them I would withdraw money at the autobank and that they should just leave me there. At this the driver's threats grew worse. He told me to shut up, that they would leave me when they were through with me. I then realised that I needed to escape quickly and when we came to a very busy intersection I seized my chance to escape and jumped out.

I leapt into a car behind me, explained to the driver what had happened and appealed for help. My rescuer's response was to speed off to a friend's house, explaining that he was going to fetch a gun.

Completely shaken by this I ran away from him and rushed into the nearest respectable looking house, explaining to the very startled residents what had happened.

They took me back to my car, now stalled on an embankment and surrounded by a large and very angry crowd. They were beating and kicking the driver, saying that they wouldn't

allow white men to touch their women. I asked if anyone had called the police but most of the crowd said the police would just protect these white men. I finally managed to persuade someone to phone the police and found myself in the position of trying to stop the crowd from assaulting my abductor.

I felt the law should be brought in to deal with this crime. Somehow I expected some sympathy or support from the police, or at the very least a degree of efficiency. Yet when the

police arrived all they seemed interested in was getting a statement from me – immediately. They simply bundled the youth into the van – no breathalyser, no search for the

weapon. I was in no condition to talk, so they proposed following me home to take my statement there. That horrified me even more. There was no way I was going to allow them to bring that man to my home. Finally they agreed that I could go home, and report for a statement later.

When my husband and I went to the police station to give them a statement on my abduction the policeman in the charge office didn't know what an abduction was. It took the arresting officers an hour to

write a two-page report – they couldn't even spell the name of my street although it is only two roads from the police station. Since then my husband's efforts to find out about the investigation have drawn a blank; the police say they have no records of the case.

To add to the irony, we discovered that the abductor was a 17-year old, light-skinned coloured youth. He had been badly assaulted by a crowd simply because they thought he was white. Strange as it may seem, I started feeling a little sorry for him. When the police took him to a cell, he started crying.

At the same time I was angry. I felt violated. What horrified me most was the fact that the youths showed a complete lack of respect for women. It seemed all I was to them was an easy victim. I felt I could never feel safe again in my own neighbourhood.

It seems I was not the only one who felt this way. I thought that I had good relationship with my white neighbour, but it was obvious that he had not overcome past prejudices. He told my mother that he has warned his wife to keep away from the shop as the area was unsafe now that so many black people had moved in – a 'little Mecca' is how he described it to my Muslim mother. He added there had never been incidents like this in the past when the area was still white.

Today, I have installed safety gates on my doors, burglar bars on my windows and drive with my car doors locked and my windows rolled up. And while I take all these precautions, I remain angry that I am forced to live like this, and am determined never to be a victim again.

By SHIREEN BADAT



Shireen Badat is administrative assistant in Idasa's media department.