

Sign of the times



**Mack I.
Julion**

Every time there is news of another letter carrier getting robbed at gunpoint for their arrow keys, without fail there is someone who will romanticize about a time when carriers were “off limits.” That is usually followed by a conversation about how respected we *were*, as if part of the problem is with today’s letter carriers. Some may even blame it on the difference in the mindset of these new generations and their lack of respect for all that is sacred.

I have concluded that it is really none of the above, but that it is more of a failure on the part

of the Postal Service to keep us safe. In this regard, I do not believe it is something that is intentionally being done, but rather what is *not* being done. Even more than that, we must all recognize that we are living in a much different world than we were even a decade ago.

Recently, as I prepared myself for my next assignment, I did so while the news story of the latest mass shooting played in the background. The next day I had an early flight to my destination, arrived and settled into my room. I decided to go out and get a feel for the city. I returned, and without watching the news, I went to bed. By the time I turned on the television the next day, there had been three other mass shootings.

I suddenly realized that the concerns of letter carriers out doing our jobs are no different than anyone else just trying to make it through another day. We are not immune to violence. Whether we are shopping in a mall or supermarket, jogging down the street, or simply have children in school, we live in an increasingly violent society and the assault on carriers is merely a sign of the times. Now, having said that, it does not absolve the Postal Service of its obligation to keep us safe.

In President Renfro’s installation speech in December and his article last month, he hit all the right notes. Our safety on the streets must be a top priority. So much so, that with every incident, we must challenge the Postal Service and even our elected officials on what they are doing to keep letter carriers of the *United States Postal Service* safe. We are couriers for

the federal government, and we should be protected as such.

While in Chicago for the annual food drive, I met with Branch 11 President Elise Foster, the A/district manager and the local A/postmaster. This meeting included local law enforcement officers, the Inspection Service and a member of Congress, and was held in the member’s office. Together, President Foster and I pressed them for answers. We told the people in that meeting that our members are keeping their heads on a swivel while delivering mail, and that they need to *know* that someone is working on something to keep them safe.

We agreed that there is no “silver bullet,” but for the sake of our members, we wanted to discuss all options. There are many carriers in Chicago and other major metro areas who are off work due to the *post*-traumatic stress of these armed robberies, while carriers at work are suffering from the *present*-traumatic stress of wondering if they are next.

In two of the delivery zones within the city, Amazon pulled out, citing the safety of its employees, and passed the additional work on to the letter carriers. Obviously, this does not make it any easier for our members, knowing that at least one of our competitors has acknowledged the inherent danger and decided not to put its employees at risk.

This was the environment in which we met, and the following are just a few of the options considered and discussed.

“De-valuing” the key—Prior to my departure, we were working with the mayor and the city council on an ordinance we drafted, which would stop the proliferation of cluster boxes. It appears that developers are being encouraged by “*someone*” to erect them everywhere, in both business and residential areas. Along with the blue boxes, it creates additional opportunities for those who have discovered the ability of the arrow key to access the mail. We know that at the center of this is a national ring of check washing and credit card theft. It has been reported that these keys have a street value, in some locations, of up to \$10,000. The ordinance is currently pending in the city council.

Nationally, the Postal Service is replacing the antiquated mailboxes and has prioritized some of the hottest areas for theft with the newer, more secure boxes. One postal inspector acknowledged that the

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Sign of the times (continued)

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current system of the arrow key dates back to the 1950s. Modern technology, such as key fob and/or remote electronic activation, needs to be implemented everywhere. The arrow key is outdated, and it is time to let it go.

Enhance street observation/security—We were told in our local meeting that FedEx has hired a security company consisting of off-duty law enforcement officers to provide surveillance on its employees while they are delivering. Meanwhile, the USPS Inspection Service and Postal Police are having internal fights over the limitations placed on their services. The Inspection Service claims that protecting carriers on the street was never the responsibility of the Postal Police and that its union is self-serving in trying to enhance its numbers in order to take on the role.

We let them know it is irrelevant to us which side is right; letter carriers are being terrorized while simply trying to do our jobs. We do not care whether it is the Department of Homeland Security, someone needs to protect the employees of the United States Postal Service. That is the message the Chicago branch sent to our congressional offices and the local city council, and I would encourage other local branches to do likewise.

Federal prosecution and public messaging—It appears to me that one of the biggest deterrents of mail theft and assaulting/robbing a postal employee is no longer present—that being the fierce “federal” prosecution and sentencing of anyone found guilty. There need to be harsher consequences. This is where legislators should find common ground. Enhance the laws in place and require all such incidents to go through federal courts.

We were informed that one of the challenges law enforcement faces is the increased use of minors to commit these crimes. Unless the violence is extreme, those cases will go to local prosecutors rather than federal prosecutors.

Either way, when someone is apprehended or prosecuted, it must be publicized. The public needs to know. But more importantly, we need to know!

The congressman we met with also implored his constituents in the district to watch over its carriers. Keeping us safe will take a collaborative effort, so we must seek to get everyone involved.

We all know there is a common denominator to all the madness—increasing societal violence—but unfortunately we cannot count on that changing anytime soon.



MISSING

HELP BRING ME HOME

NCMEC: 1476509

Summer Greenwood



Missing Since: Mar 29, 2023
Missing From: Evanston, IL
DOB: Aug 12, 2009
Age Now: 13
Sex: Female
Race: White
Hair Color: Lt. Brown
Eye Color: Blue
Height: 5'5"
Weight: 155 lbs

Summer was last seen March 29, 2023.

DON'T HESITATE!

ANYONE HAVING INFORMATION SHOULD CONTACT

CALL 911 OR

1-800-843-5678 (1-800-THE-LOST®)
Evanston Police Department (Illinois) 1-847-866-5000



MISSING

HELP BRING ME HOME

NCMEC: 1479194

Laila Brown



Missing Since: Apr 29, 2023
Missing From: Philadelphia, PA
DOB: Dec 19, 2009
Age Now: 13
Sex: Female
Race: Black
Hair Color: Brown
Eye Color: Brown
Height: 5'1"
Weight: 120 lbs

Laila was last seen on April 29, 2023.

DON'T HESITATE!

ANYONE HAVING INFORMATION SHOULD CONTACT

CALL 911 OR

1-800-843-5678 (1-800-THE-LOST®)
Philadelphia Police Department (Pennsylvania) 1-215-686-3093