

1-28-11 Leaving The Scene Is Preventable

Many years ago, when I was in school, I saw a woman working for the health promotion program wearing a button. The button said, a "If it can be predicted, it can be prevented. If it can be prevented, it is not an accident!" I read the button, nodded my head and smiled. I liked it. I asked if she had any extras because I wanted to wear one for my own children to read. They were still young at the time and talking about predictable and preventable problems was a frequently given lecture of mine. And my children's response, "but mom, it was an accident!" was a frequently heard excuse. Or at least they thought it was an excuse; I did not always agree.

The image of that button came to my mind last week and I've been thinking about it ever since. In this case, the accident was a traffic accident and while the victim was a dog, it could have easily been a child or a back-up of several cars filled with people.

I was on my way home after work on Thursday, January 20, a little after five o'clock. I had already crossed the town line from Halifax into Plympton on route 58, when the traffic came to a halt. I did not see any flashing lights indicating police presence. The traffic was not moving at all, except for some cars turning around at the nearest driveway and heading back to Halifax. Now I was curious. Since the traffic wasn't moving at all I had enough room to move out and closer to the center of the road. All the headlights shone on a large dark object lying in the center of the road. For a moment, I thought I was looking at a person lying on the left side. The shape resembled hips, waist and wider shoulders. I was shocked to think that no one was helping this person. The shape began to move and I could see that it was a very large dog that could not stand but struggled to lift itself just enough to move a few inches and then collapse.

At that moment I knew I had to pull over and try to help in any way I could. I knew that I had two large flannel sheets in the back of my car and I thought perhaps I could use these to drag the dog out of the road. When I pulled into the driveway I met a young woman who had seen the accident. She felt terrible because she had witnessed it but wasn't able to prevent it. She had not been able to see the license plate of the car that hit the dog. She only knew that it was red and that it did not stop. She had called the police and was waiting and hoping for some assistance.

In the meantime, the large dog had dragged herself to the edge of the road. I ran to my car to get the flannel sheets and to make room in the back for transporting her to a vet. A police officer arrived and now that the dog was out of the road, traffic started to move once again. I could hear a crunching sound with a regular rhythm, as both lanes of traffic drove over large pieces of plastic. I turned to the young woman and she could read my mind. She said, "That's how bad the impact was. Those are pieces of the fender from the red car that hit the dog."

I spoke to a nearby vet who told me she'd be able to evaluate the dog but wanted me to realize that quite often a dog hit by a car received injuries so extensive that they needed a 24/7, facility, which her practice was not. She also advised me to use something such as a belt to wrap around the dog's mouth to act as a muzzle because the dog would understandably be upset and might be apt to bite. It was good advice, I'm sure, but by then I had already approached the dog and even though her mouth was full of blood she not only gave me a smile but even wagged her tail when I patted her. I was convinced the muzzle wasn't needed.

The police officer was kind and agreed to assist me in lifting the dog to the back of my car. The owners were now present, for the dog was in front of its own home. They were, of course, distraught and could not understand why the dog went toward the road in the first place, for it was not the dog's usual habit. The dog had been let out and was expected to return to the

back door. When she had not returned to the door, they went to look and then realized the traffic problem.

Halifax Veterinary Service assessed the dog and knew right away that an overnight facility was needed and so the journey continued by bringing the dog to Hanover.

I stayed for a while but when their daughter arrived and I knew everyone had a ride home; I decided it was time for me to leave. CPR had already been used to revive the dog and the prognosis looked grim. I expressed my hope for the best.

I don't know if the driver of the red car could have prevented the accident. I do know that seeing the results on the face of that sweet mastiff called Dyna, short for Dynasty, made me wonder if "accident" is really the right word. I thought of that button. "If it can be predicted, it can be prevented. If it can be prevented, it is not an accident!" Only the driver of the red car knows but we can learn from the experience. Take care, for lives depend on it.

Cathleen Drinan is the health agent for Halifax, MA. If you know someone owning a red car with some chunks of plastic missing, ask them to call me. Of course, they did not intend to hit the dog, but leaving? That could have been prevented. I can put the driver in touch with the dog's owner. Sometimes, all we can do is apologize. You can reach her at 781-293-6768 or cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us