

## 07-20-18 A Midsummer's Night Dream

There seems to be more robins this year than any other. This often seems to be the case earlier on in the year, with some having stayed for winter and then being joined by the arrival of their snowbird brothers and sisters. This, year, though, everywhere I go, I see the robins walking hopping, looking for food and I hear their loud, insistent chirp, chirp. This summer's ever-presence of robins has reminded me of the Shakespearean character, Robin Goodfellow. While it is Citizen Goodfellow I hope to meet in my day-to-day work, I meet all types and crazy plots develop, just like those in the play.

I may not have the magical flower to place upon the eyelids of some citizens, causing them to fall in love with the first person they see, (oh, how handy that might be, for I can tell you, they don't always love me!) but I do have something we can all use: the power of intention. It actually works well with people. It goes something like this: I imagine what the law intended, and I keep that in mind when I talk to people. It can be the most mundane topic, say, a rubbish complaint. Of course, first of all, I must have an open mind, picturing nothing at all, when I make that call. They are innocent until proven guilty, right?

And there are all kinds of circumstances. I have true empathy for many of them. For instance, I once received a call complaining about a mattress being outdoors in the neighbor's yard. Something in my gut advised me to make some inquiries first and I was glad I did. The mattress had appeared only that week and it appeared after someone had died on it. So, I did not call on that household but returned a call to the complainer or the plaintiff in this case. The intention of the law is to prevent disease. In this case, disease might follow the creation of something attracting and harboring animals. That does not happen over night. We will give this scenario and its participants some time and, probably, the right thing will happen.

In the case of the more typical scenario, the defendant has left rubbish outdoors, just like the characters in the play hanging out their dirty laundry and, sure enough, animals have been there. Knowing that I might meet up with other characters from the play, such as one appearing as an ass, I need some good weaponry when I arrive to pronounce my confirmation of law being broken. Rather than talking to the guilty party about the law, it is more efficacious to talk about the intent of law. We live in an amazing country with amazingly wise laws, at least the old ones written by our forefathers and mothers. Our foreparents had good intentions and left these laws broad in scope to apply, not as we wish but as we need. And what I need is for the defendant to realize the effects of leaving rubbish out, especially rubbish with garbage, is that it does attract animals and does breed flies.

At this point in the play, I am usually met with head shaking and smirks, as their eyes and head turn to a neighbor's house. While it may be true that the neighbor called about the unwanted appearance of rubbish, it is my job to explain that it does not matter at all from whence the complaint came. It is my job to talk about why they must clean up the rubbish. And I mean it. I list as many options as I can think of, including recycling to cut down on the costs of rubbish disposal but in the end, rubbish needs to be kept contained and then disposed of in ways that honor the intent of the law.

At this point in the play, I so want a happy ending and, so, I imagine it. I picture my intention in my mind's eye. Sometimes I keep it to myself for the time being, especially

if it is a long-range goal. If I have reason to expect and the need to expect quick action, then I share my intention with the defendant. If necessary, I might even have to list the consequences of not obeying the law. Fines can be applied. Tickets can be issued. But the laws weren't written to collect fees or to tie up the judicial system with problems that can and should be resolved at the local level. That is just a list of carrots and sticks, carrots and sticks. Better to focus on carrots and arriving at the goal.

Sometimes a fence goes up and it makes for good neighbors. Sometimes the defendant wishes to make use of their right to be heard, since they feel aggrieved. In that case, we all meet and talk to the board, from whom I receive my authority to act on behalf of their direct legislative power. In the end, we might not be in love, as in Shakespeare's play, but we had an interesting time, learned a lot and ended up resolving what needed to be resolved. Rather than leading to a nightmare, the power of intention can be a dream come true.

*Cathleen Drinan is the health agent for Halifax, MA. What do you intend for your town? Tell her at 781 293 6768 or [cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us](mailto:cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us)*