

The Sun

Fraying of suburbia's security blanket

Howard County: Conviction of rapist brings justice, but does not calm crime fears.

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OTHER THAN SCHOOLS, the perception of security is probably suburbia's most attractive quality. Certainly, families shopping for homes in Howard County are lured by its relatively low crime rate.

For the most part, their reading is correct. Crime in Howard is considerably below the area's average. But one shocking criminal act -- the rape of a 15-year-old girl abducted outside a library or the carjacking and murder of a mother in midday -- can make residents double-check the front doors and scrutinize strangers more carefully.

Crime statistics held no comfort for residents five years ago after two bandits carjacked Pam Basu in Savage. The criminals drove away in Dr. Basu's BMW and dragged her to a horrible death when she became entangled in a seat belt, her 22-month-old child in the back seat. The county's sense of security took a body blow again last winter when a teen-age honor student was raped outside the library in Columbia while her 7-year-old sister was forced to watch.

A conviction last weekend in the rape case brought some relief, as did convictions in the Basu murder. The teen-age rape victim can be assured that her attacker, Timothy Bryan Chase, 29, of Columbia, will remain in prison for a long time. When he is sentenced, prosecutors are certain to ask Circuit Judge Diane O. Leasure to impose a stiff sentence. Dr. Basu's killers are serving life sentences, one of them without the possibility of parole. |

Although the legal system worked to bring justice in these cases, the county's security blanket has lost some of its fiber. Neither crime occurred in the shadows of a dark alley or a secluded bike path. Dr. Basu was attacked near her home while preparing to take her child to preschool. The rapist Chase approached his victims outside the library, a supposed safe haven, and forced them to an isolated area.

Residents interviewed at the library following the rape conviction told a Sun reporter they are more cautious now about their safety. One 11th-grader in Wilde Lake said her mother is more worried about her whereabouts; the mother of 15-year-old twins said she is concerned that such a crime could happen again.

There is good reason why such offenses legally are considered crimes against the state.

They make victims of us all.

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