

BEWARE OF THY NEIGHBOURS

- by **C.V.Anand**, S.P.,CID.

Smt.Meena Jayesh Patel a 22 year old lady, hailing from Rajkot in Gujarat, was married to Jayesh Hansraj, a small time businessman in Hyderabad. The couple had a 11 months old child and were staying on the 2nd floor as tenants in Troop Bazaar, Abids Police Station area since 2001.

As time passed, Meena Patel realized that her husband's business was not doing too well and she was having great difficulty in running the house. The birth of a child complicated matters for her. Then, she hit upon a plan, which if well implemented, would help in stabilising the business of her husband.

On the same floor of these flats were living the family of Mr.Sanjay Gawalkar along with his wife and child. Gawalkar was a retailer of electronic items with the outlet in Abids area. Mrs Meena started visiting their house and in a short time, developed a deep acquaintance with Mrs. Gawalkar. The trust grew to such an extent that Mrs Gawalkar would entrust the keys of her house to Mrs Patel whenever she would go out. She became a part of the house hold and they became great friends.

In February 2002 Sanjay Gawalkar went to Nanded on a business trip and he left his wife and daughter at his in-laws place in Charminar area. Before leaving they requested Mrs Meena to look after the house. Sanjay returned three days

later and when he opened the front door and went inside, he found the almirah door ajar and Rs.1.30 lacs cash missing from it. What surprised him was that all the doors were properly bolted from inside and locked from outside- just as he had left them, then how did the thief enter the house?.

When Sanjay lodged a complaint with Abids Police, the crime S.I.concluded that this had to be the handiwork of some 'insider'. When Mrs Patel and her husband were sought to be thoroughly interrogated, Mrs Gawalkar expressed that it was not fair to question her dear friend Mrs Meena, who had by then started shedding tears about her innocence. With the expression of trust, the SI too felt he was on the wrong track and let them go. The search for finger prints drew a blank and the case was left undetected. Out of sheer disappointment, the Gawalkar family vacated this premises and moved to a new locality. While departing, Mrs Patel was all tears and put a grand show of affection.

In the month of April 2001 Mr.Ashok Kumar, a Forest Range Officer on deputation to the Municipal Corporation of Hyderabad, moved into this flat vacated by the Gawalkars, along with his wife and child. Mrs Patel was all help to them and went out of her way to make them feel comfortable, cooked for them, fed the small child and went shopping with Mrs

Kumar. Resultantly, they became thick friends and would spend almost the entire day with each other. Whenever Mrs Kumar went out the key would be given to Mrs Patel for 'safekeeping'. In September 2002 Mr Kumar went to Bangalore on some official work. The same day Mrs. Kumar's father who was a real estate businessman, sent Rs.3.5 lacs cash to be kept with her daughter towards a certain payment. Mrs Kumar kept this cash in her almirah and locked it.

Mr.Kumar returned from Bangalore 3 days later. A day later, when Mrs Kumar's father came to take the cash, they opened the almirah locker and lo! the cash was missing. As can be imagined, this created a problem in the family too, with the father in law accusing his son-in-law and daughter too of cheating him and left in a huff. Also stolen was Mr Kumar's 6 tola gold chain..

Mr Kumar lodged a complaint with Abids Police and the DCP along with the Crime Team of Abids reached the scene. The S.I. realized that it was the same flat where a house breaking offence had occurred 7 months ago. He also noticed Mrs Patel hanging around and wanted to question her. But, in their complaint itself, Kumar expressed doubt on their jeep driver Mr Mirazu, because another neighbour had seen him enter the premises once during the previous 3 days. Thorough interrogation of Mirazu did not yield any clue. As per instructions, the SI again turned his attention on the Patels and summoned them for questioning. Mr and Mrs Kumar both came to the Police Station and vouched for her innocence. This case also seemed to be lying undetected when a lucky breakthrough

was obtained in March 2002- a full 6 months later!

Mrs. Patel went to Sanjay Gawalkar's shop to buy an Air Cooler. She paid in cash and took the cooler home. Sanjay noticed his initials on one of the old notes given by Mrs Patel Everyday he used to count the cash, segregate them denomination wise into bundles, write the numbers and then put his initial on the top most note. He immediately approached the Crime S.I. Abids, and the DCP too was informed.

A woman SI, some women constables brought the Patels to the Police Station. There upon, being confronted with the initialled note, Mrs Patel broke down and confessed to having committed both these burglaries. The property in both cases was recovered from polythene bag kept under a loose tile in one corner of the kitchen.

Her Modus Operandi had been to befriend, gain love and trust and make a duplicate of the keys given to her. Having gained access, she kept track of the cash available with her friends through desultory talks and struck when the time was ripe. And all this, without the knowledge of her husband and as Mrs Patel put it 'in good faith' to help him settle down in life. If the husband questioned her about the money, she planned to tell him that it was sent by her parents.

Some newspapers titled this story "Beware thy neighbour's wife"!