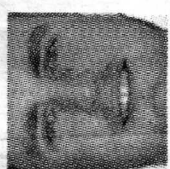


Blocking the late-night drama with a wall of indifference



Michael Kooi

the drill too well. Between 2 a.m. and 3 a.m. each Thursday through Sunday, we're treated to a forced intermission from our slumbers as young drunks stumble home from downtown watering holes. Fortunately, the ruckus rarely rises above kids talking in their "inside voices" — as in, "inside the bar" — and some occasional horseplay.

Formerly a prodigious college drunk myself, I have a high tolerance for such shenanigans. Two recent incidents, however, make me wonder whether I've crossed the line between tolerance and desensitization.

The first occurred a few weeks ago, when I awoke to shouting around 2:30 a.m. As I came fully to, I distinctly heard a young woman's

voice — slightly woozy — yell. "Get the (expletive) out of my house!" Immediately, I felt a shot of adrenaline and reached for my cell phone. Instead of calling 911, though, I paused, remembering the thump-thump-thump of a stereo coming from that same direction when I went to bed. I listened for more, ready to dial at the next sound of strife.

None came. Had the offending party found his manners and complied with the request? Or did he brain the agitated host with a brick and run for Chester Creek? After about five minutes, I dropped my phone and returned to bed.

Two weeks later, I awoke around the same time to the sound of a male voice, stentorian yet slurring into a cell phone. Bellowing, "Melissa!" intermittently as it approached, the voice began asking this woman why she didn't want to be with him anymore. "Do you like one of my friends better?" it implored.

"What a (same expletive) loser," I thought, irritated. Perhaps Melissa agreed with me, because he followed with, "Well, if you won't be with me, I'm gonna kill myself."

Again came that shot of adrenaline. Looking out the window, I heard receding sobbs and sniffles but saw no body. The voice had been

heading toward the creek. Was this just booze-soaked teeny-bopper drama or would this dope actually jump from the Eighth Street Bridge?

I won't say that I listened for a splash. But again, I didn't call the cops, either. About 10 minutes later, I heard soft whimpering approach from the opposite direction. Whether it was the same gentleman or a different member of the evening's Broken Hearts Club, I cannot say.

So what's a homeowner to do? On one hand, the public discussions about the new unified city code revealed that a better mix of tolerance and courtesy would be required to improve relations between students and

homeowners. I also believe the police have better things to do than run down every cry in the night.

On the other hand, there's always a chance that incidents like these will end tragically. Is the blood on your hands if you don't make the call?

Sadly, such questions have me pricing window air-conditioning units more than searching my soul. The shouts and dramas outside will persist, of course. But from inside an envelope of cool indifference and ignorant bliss, it seems the best antidote for bad neighbors is to be a bad one yourself.

MICHAEL KOOI of Duluth's East Hillside neighborhood is a freelance writer and communications professional.