



Just when society headed off in a hand basket

As I drove past a house the other day, a man rushed out and smashed a ukulele on the road. You read right – a ukulele. I'm picking it won't make music again, but more importantly I'm thinking something terrible was possibly going on in that man's house and in his head.

I drove on. I don't know if the police got involved. Events like that have become a topic of political anxiety of late and are an escalating reason why being a police officer these days must be somewhat hellish.

In the past year, New Zealand police attended nearly 100 threat, mental illness or suicide callouts a day on average. Then there's murder, rape, drugs, gangs, robbery and death-knocks at the doors of the bereaved.

Judging by weekly emails sent out by the Neighbourhood Support arm telling us what burglars, petty thieves and car converters have been up to, even mundane crime these days is a pretty cheerless arena for your average cop.

Which brings me to the reason why I'm writing this: it's to give the people in blue recognition for one of the more positive things they get to do - reunite society with its lost relics. In our case, it was a set of keys.

The string of events ("chain" is too strong a word) that led eventually to the box of keys under the public counter at New Plymouth's main copshop began serenely at the scene of one of John Matthews' many notable public gifts, the mini wind wands at East End Reserve.

She who has an artistic eye for taking photos was lying on her back in a position that approached the undignified, recording a video up at the sky as the little wands waved about. The shoot successfully accomplished, we wandered off. At home, she couldn't find her keys. They'd dropped out of her pocket. A rush trip back to the wands proved fruitless.

Then began the exchange of information in tones of tightly suppressed exasperation that follows all such accidents, more an interrogation, during which it's established beyond all doubt just how inconvenient this unplanned loss will prove to be. And which keys had we lost, precisely.

There was a bit of luck. The electronic car key, worth hundreds, was not among them. It had been taken off the key ring because it made the bunch too bulky for the tiny pockets in the clothes favoured by one half of most partnerships.

Missing were the front door key, the office key, the mailbox key, the shed key, the key to the padlock to the gate to the back deck, and one other, the hassle one. That one was the only copy.

A key re-organisation followed. Options for locating spares and hiding entry keys were revised and then revised again. There was a trip into town by the “guilty” party to get more cut.

For angst, it was a mere step away from a death in the family. But it did make for social discourse, which was when our good friend Lester suggested we try the police station. Nah, surely a waste of time, mate. No, says he. Oh well. Why not. Nothing to lose.

And everything to gain. The policeman asked what they looked like, these lost keys. Like this blue one, says she who had reluctantly made the trip, even though there didn’t seem much hope people would be as honest as that.

You’ve guessed the rest: keys recovered, faith in human nature rejuvenated, respect for police and their systems boosted, equilibrium in the Tucker household fully restored (Mr Bleeding Know-it-all hushed).

Acting police sergeant David Lee tells me they have a constant stream of lost property handed in at the station, dominated by wallets, cellphones, keys and glasses. The flow fluctuates - one week no wallets, then last week seven. Money still in them, mostly.

The staffer mainly responsible for recording all this says summer tends to be busier. People go to the beach for a swim or a surf and shed things. Some are forgotten. Valuable stuff, like the latest smart phones and car keys that can be worth a couple of grand. Some are never claimed.

And then there’s the unusual stuff – for instance, a metre-and-half tall carving standing in one corner of the station’s lost property room (**right**).

Big ups to the police and to person who handed in our keys. You have no idea the joy you engendered.

