

The garage door was wide open. I didn't recall leaving it like that. I scanned the one-car garage and noticed that my bike was gone from the usual rungs on the left wall.

Two weeks later, I walked up to my car door, parked outside the garage, and immediately noticed broken glass. My passenger window had been smashed and my centre and passenger-console has been rifled through.

At least once a week, I walk through my back gate and see footprints leading to my empty and unlocked shed. It is unlocked because someone has previously broken the chain that kept it closed.

It is a weird feeling being a victim of property crime. Personally, I feel more uneasy with the knowledge that someone has accessed my property than with the loss of my personal effects. I have been lucky in some ways though, because in my case the items taken have not held significant value and the repairs have been minimal. However, as property crimes increase and as specific neighbourhoods and certain residences become frequent targets, victims in these communities are becoming increasingly frustrated.

Firsthand accounts are being shared on social media groups where members are connecting with each other to share their concerns. Personally, I joined a "Bike lost+found Winnipeg" one in a last-ditch effort to see if I could find my bike. Stolen bikes *and* recovered bikes are posted daily, but I also immediately noticed the undercurrent of vigilantism that exists in these groups.

Users are sharing images taken by their home security cameras of suspected car thief's. They are also posting images of the shoeprints that have walked up to their cars or garages. These amateur sleuths are even comparing shoeprints with those of their neighbours to see if they can identify one offender. Suspected bike thieves' photos are pulled from their Buy and Sell

classified ad profile pictures and shared in these groups. These activities are taking place on Facebook and are using other social media sites, like Kijiji, Craigslist and Letgo (a seedier version of Kijiji) to identify suspects. In the community group I am a part of there is clear frustration from members as they are repairing their car windows for the second, third, or fourth time. Some have even taken to putting signs in their cars that tell a would-be thief that not only are the doors unlocked, but there is nothing in the car. There is also a sense that there has been an increase in the number of crimes occurring.

It is a fair question to ask. The answer is yes and no. In the short term, reported crime has risen in the last three years. However, this increase comes at the end of a long period of declining reported crime in Winnipeg. In St. Boniface, reported property crime specifically has risen from 26, 102 reported offences in 2014 to 42, 568 in 2018. It is important to understand that these statistics show that *reported crime* has risen. However, some of these numbers are likely even higher because of what criminologists call the “hidden figure of crime” which includes crimes that often go unreported. Property crimes is included in this category. Want to find out more about the trend in property crimes in your neighbourhood? The Winnipeg Police Service (WPS) has a handy online tool for you to check out. Find it [here!](#)

There are also some innovative programs taking place around the city to try and keep up with property crimes. For example, the WPS claims that the number of bike thefts incidents went up more than 82% from 717 to 1304 between 2012 and 2017. To try and mitigate these offences the WPS are using “Bait bikes” to identify bike thieves. Bikes are chained up and fixed with a GPS device and then tracked when they are taken.

There is also an active attempt to recover and return bikes however, the City of Winnipeg recovers up to 1000 bicycles each year, with less than 10% returned to their rightful owners. The

best way for the WPS to recover your bike is to have it registered with the City of Winnipeg and to know your serial number. You can register your bike [here](#) and if your bike is stolen, you can report it [here](#) to the WPS or contact 311. For instances of minor property crimes, you can report it online to the WPS [here](#). The City of Winnipeg recovers over 1000 bikes every year, and only about 10% are ever returned to their owners. If your bike has been stole, like mine, you can also check out the Annual Bike Auction hosted by the City of Winnipeg and the WPS. This year's is coming up on April 27 – 28, 2019. Find out more information [here](#).

Are there any theories to why we are seeing such a spike in crime in Winnipeg? The WPS have claimed that the meth crisis is a large part of the problem, and that items such as bikes are a common target because not only can they be taken easily but they can be quickly sold online or broken down and sold for parts. Also, by engaging in minor property theft, addicts are still able to support their addictions because meth is notoriously cheaper than other drugs.

Although more officers have been dedicated to deal with the issue, there are still gaps in services to help people deal with their meth addictions and to prevent them from getting hooked in the first place. In 2001, there were 12 meth-related prosecutions in Manitoba. In 2018, that number increased to 745.

There will not be a simple solution to these issues. If meth addiction continues to grow in our city, it is reasonable to assume that property crimes will not decrease. There will be no easy solution to this problem. Prevention programs and supports for meth users are likely a large part of the solution. However, this requires that politician's direct public policy and funding towards these types of programs. It seems as though Winnipegger's are making a connection between the meth crisis and property crime, and hopefully it's enough to recognize that incarcerating addicts will be less beneficial than supporting them with their addiction.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/crime-winnipeg-analysis-election-1.4844294>

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/drug-crime-winnipeg-police-annual-report-1.4757778>

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/winnipeg-police-bait-bikes-1.4832163>) to attempt to nab would-be thieves.

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/vancouver-woman-steals-bike-back-after-seeing-ad-for-it-on-craigslist/article13951281/>

[https://winnipeg.ca/cms/BLES/LS/bicycle\\_license.stm](https://winnipeg.ca/cms/BLES/LS/bicycle_license.stm)