



Guardian Angels Founder Curtis Sliwa Puts Us in Sicilian Handcuffs

Big Think Editors on August 4, 2010, 12:00 AM



Despite what the brainiacs from the Ivy League say, citizen's arrests are not vigilante acts, according to Guardian Angels founder Curtis Sliwa. In fact, he insists that they have been "embedded into the fabric of law since the Magna Carta." In 1979, Sliwa created the Guardian Angels, a volunteer neighborhood patrol, at a time when New York was practically lawless. In the subsequent 31 years, the Guardian Angels haven't been sued once even though they've made thousands of interventions in over 140 cities around the globe.

The ambiguous legality of citizen's arrests notwithstanding, Sliwa spent much of his Big Think interview teaching us how to take the law into our own hands in the name of Good Samaritanism. Like a "Chinese menu," he offered three different scenarios to choose from, depending on the seriousness of the situation. If you're up against a "real nebbish" who "probably does yoga," the amount of physical force you'll need to exert is minimal, Sliwa told us. But if the perpetrator is looking to put up a fight, things may get more interesting, and Sliwa gave us some martial arts lessons that we won't soon forget.

Aside from putting us in "Sicilian handcuffs," Sliwa talked about the problems that still plague our society. Though things are much better than they were 30 years ago, crime is still rampant, and the biggest contributor is dysfunction in the family, says Sliwa: "Dysfunction is what paralyzes society. It means people learn less. They can't function properly. They can't speak. They can't communicate. They have anger management problems. They develop necessities and desires to have drugs and alcohol to self medicate."

To combat this disfunction, Sliwa suggested some rather "draconian" measures: "You wouldn't be able to get married in my society until you were 30. I would put you in a gulag. If you dare got married before 30 I'd think the furniture was upstairs and rearranged in the wrong rooms and if you decided to have kids I'm going to test you first...I'd want to test your parenting skills."