

# Opinion: Law enforcement abuse of power is unforgivable

By Kathryn Reed

Maybe it should be called the *injustice* system.

Due process is clearly not a phrase that is applied equally to all who come in contact with law enforcement.

While there are plenty of stories about individuals who have been wrongly accused being set free with new evidence, what about those who are left in limbo? It's an entirely different form of purgatory.

Our criminal justice system is supposed to be about being innocent until proven guilty. But the way the system works – and information is distributed – it is more like guilty until proven innocent.

A person is arrested and the public perception is the suspect is guilty. All the media has to go on is the police report or what the cops say. Reaching the suspect behind bars isn't as easy as picking up the phone. And often if an attorney has been retained, the line of communication is immediately cutoff.

That keeps the story one-sided. It's all about what law enforcement has to say.

Yes, the suspect or person of interest can choose not to listen to legal advice. But based on that seldom happening, the conclusion one can draw is that it's safer to be tried in a courtroom than the media.

There are two residents of South Lake Tahoe who have not been

arrested, but their lives have been turned upside down by law enforcement and subsequently the media. One usually tells his side, the other is mum.

I'm talking about Johnny Poland and Angela Swanson.

Neither one has been charged with a crime. Neither one has been arrested. Both have been the targets of law enforcement. Both are in limbo.

The cases are completely different, but the consequences to date are similar. An investigation is going on, law enforcement is not talking, evidence has not been presented to them or the public, and they are spending money to defend themselves against the unknown.

What is outrageous is that this is almost 2013 and it's allowed to happen in the United States.

Law enforcement should not have the power to ruin lives. Investigate and charge. Go to court. See what the judge or jury says. But limbo – that should never be tolerated.

Law enforcement seldom seems to be held accountable for the wrongs they have committed.

No one is perfect and we all make mistakes. But cops, district attorneys, parole officers – their mistakes can destroy lives.

Look at the Jaycee Lee Dugard case. An 11-year-old is whisked away from a bus stop in Meyers, found 18 years later in 2009 at a ramshackle abode only three hours away in the Bay Area. Parole officers came to the house. Jaycee kept being raped. Unforgivable.

It's also unforgivable what is happening to Poland and Swanson.

