

Another Voice Chimes in from the OK Chorale

Written by Alex Baer

Thursday, 20 December 2012 20:49

This is another one of those pieces attempting to reconcile what we know of our culture and country, and still have it make some sense after another round of innocents have been slaughtered.

Just one more voice in the trying-to-be-OK choir and chorale, here, wondering how it is we had another place of learning and laughter turn into a one-sided OK Corral.

Many people are doing the same, to greater and lesser degrees of futility or utility. Some people are so far past the deep end, they're wheeling out all the things they already hate, plugging in their old lists as legitimate new causes.

There's blaming aplenty here, with the Sandy Hook deaths hung on everything from Godless schools or courts to Obamacare, then caroming off to the evils and perils of abortion, then ricocheting past the rights of gays to make a contract and marry, the bullet points bounding back around again, arguing that, *if only there had been more male teachers in the school...*

Yes, and dunce politicians spray their ideas around like clouds of DDT, wanting teachers transformed and armed, playing SWAT Leader at recess and football practice as easily as they perform the Seal Team Shuffle at dance practice or during civics. These are not compatible skills -- providing nourishment and care to kids on the one hand, but always ready to slip into an assassin's role -- and it's a stunner to realize how infrequently this sort of poison-pill idea is being pointing out as such.

Meanwhile, there's a small burg in Texas that's already let teachers bring their guns to school, not as show-and-tell, but as shoot-to-kill. It's a very disturbing trend -- right up there with getting Kevlar and Armor All to sponsor the school play, or for armored car companies to put in bids for the school bus routes.

Of course, trying to tackle this subject, even on a calm day -- let alone while emotions are still high, tangled, and jangled -- is just asking for trouble. One might as well go ahead and hug the third rail and be done with it.

(I mean, I really wasn't going to comment on this one, but find that I am after all. Against my better judgment. It may help to remember that a bolt of lightning, at around 53,540 degrees Fahrenheit, is more than 43,000 degrees hotter than the surface of the sun. That thought makes it a cinch that my scalp will stay nice and toasty on a chill December day, right after I take a lightning bolt to the head as punishment for tackling such a bottomless topic.)

Difficult, sharp-edged, and multi-sided as this discussion is, we should fess up to the task like adults. Surely our love of gunpowder, and the miracle of lead whizzing past in mid air, will not outstrip our basic respect for one another, nor blur our ability to accurately see what's been going so badly wrong. That would be the hope -- difficult as that might be to lump in with the general subject of human, on the whole.

Somehow, it seems we never get around to talking about the many *gateway drugs* to a main event overdose like this. There sure are lots of threshold experiences to take in and track, trying to check which-causes-what, and whether for anyone, a few, none, or mostly all.

There's lots of soul-searching and casting about for answers, like happens every time one of these sad storms blows through the nation, ending in many kids killed. I wish no parent such unending pain and grief -- which is why, to detour a moment, I don't understand why we're not all as equally ripped up, torn apart, and beset by questions and grief when, halfway around the world, a drone blasts a number of children right out of their homes or shoes.

In both situations, the fatal crime of the children was simple: *They were present*. Why do we not have more tears and angst to spare at those funerals, same as here? See: Everything gets *mooshed* together, and isolating causes, effects, and possible cures becomes as clear and easy as separating out the dirt and water from mud.

Barriers between subjects evaporate and interesting questions are asked on this quest to understand. Here's one now: I don't know -- why *do* we revel in murders and death as entertainment, suffocating ourselves like death cultists in the stuff on teevee and in movies and books? I'm disturbed to discover within me an ironic urge to march the writers and producers of such murderously insensitively and twisted sludge out to the courtyard wall and let the lead fly in their general directions for a little while.

(Must be contagious, this stuff.) Seriously, though: Why do we rely on murder and death in our entertainments, surrounding ourselves with dead bodies left and right? You'd think we enjoy such ghoulish treats, based on the sheer number of them. After a while, death is expected and cheap.

Murders are shortcuts and ready-made pivot points for lazy writers. Combine that with producers' insane wish lists for entertainment from providers -- anything that can double as an investment with a known rate of return is just the ticket. You know: Something that's a shoo-in to guarantee a certain number of eyeballs can be readily snagged to receive those all-important sponsor messages. In between shootings and stabbings, that is.

Even though we are by far in the lead for handgun deaths at 10,728 last year, with most countries averaging "only" double-digit deaths from handguns, this inconceivable stuff happens everywhere. Example: The same-day horrors of Sandy Hook, here, and a site in China, where a knife-wielding man stabbed 22 children and a woman at a primary school.

And, even considering people can be dim bulbs, how to explain these:

- The man who lugged a two-by-four bearing the words *HIGH POWERED RIFLE* into Sandy Hook Elementary in Virginia?
- The Teabagger who tweeted a *mysterioso* message of paranoia regarding a gas foisted on them by people who want their guns?
- The religious psychos who think Jon Stewart's behind it all -- along with those who won't stop warring on Christmas?
- The rightwingers who are sure feminism's to blame?
- People scurrying to grab goodies in case these toys (gulp!) aren't available anymore!

Pick your ideal dementia or set of loose screws, your favorite conspiracy theory or preferred hallucination -- we have an explanation for all occasions. Step right up -- we got thousands of 'em cooking away, bubbling just under the surface in the Good Ol' USA, coast to coast.

Looks like even the Bloodmeister himself, Quentin Tarantino, was forced to cancel the premiere

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of his western which contains a large number of killings, it is said, drenched in his trademarked splatters, geysers, and gushers of blood. *That's entertainment: □ Murder a Go-Go. □ Tip over some thousand-gallon vats of blood, get that trick blood suit pumping it out harder -- see if you can get it to squirt out ten feet or so...*

But, Quentin's tired of defending his films, he says, whenever there's an outbreak of violence: "I just think you know there's violence in the world, tragedies happen, blame the playmakers. It's a western. Give me a break." OK, Quentin -- but, *you* give *us* a break *first*, and quit romancing the hell out of spurting blood.

Meanwhile, it's like the subject of gun con ---

Freeze. If you're like most Americans, you just slipped one very specific round into your thought chamber just then. You thought a mention of *gun control* was on the way, inevitable in such accounts, right? And, by thinking of *gun control*, you already had this thing pegged -- a whole range of beliefs and actions occurred to you, in a flash.

It takes a lifetime of learning to get all that into your head, just as it takes a lifetime to come to think of guns as the most natural solution to problems, and the most natural tool for use in the whole, wide world -- *clean, antiseptic, just pull back on this lever and the problem disappears.*

Maybe we'll be able to have a *gun conversation* sometime in this country -- one that's not already pre-made, canned, individually wrapped, and made years in advance. Not a national conversation already pre-driven by traditions, upbringing, closed minds, or predigested bits of NRA blurbs.

Someday, we might be able to have that conversation without the mention of *gun control* -- and having people get the automatic, knee-jerk thought *Obama's coming to get my guns!*

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No, frankly, I cannot imagine President Obama has any interest whatsoever in your pistols, popguns, and assorted penis extenders, people. Although rightwing lunatics would do well to consider that the only American president who's ever confiscated guns was a make-believe *good ol' boy* -- a Republican named Dubya.

And, as always, about now the question of credentials and motivations always pops up during one of these pieces. OK, then -- I'm game. Where do you want to start? How about 8 years of military service, then -- rewarded by a rare interval of peace (and by a shattered marriage and near-bankruptcy from stresses and strains of serving, if you really want to get nosey).

Sure, I can understand target shooting, say -- human and machine, striving for excellence in any environment, really, and in any of a number of precise ways. No problems there. Archery, bowling, pottery, running the Large Hadron Collider -- whatever.

And, yes -- I took the anthropomorphic journey with animals when young, and, even fully Disney-fied, for better or worse, I still eat meat. If I had to go get it myself, instead of plucking it from the styro-wrapped tree, I'd be eating fish and seafood from now on. (I try to not be a tap-dancing hypocrite about such things, but willing to admit my foibles.)

Happy to admit, too, I couldn't get through a screening of film made that demonstrated the killing, butchering, and slicing-and-dicing of cattle, the whole routine, start to finish, one by one -- going from a whole animal, and whittling it down to its various parts.

As much as I am a non-hunting individual, and did not, as a city kid, go hunting with my dad, I'm still happy to allow you a manual-load, one-round-at-a-time-rifle. Although I'd much prefer you prove your manhood and meat-providing prowess by going off with a penknife and some track shoes, and coming back with your trophy after a real *Mano a mano* contest.

Not much too fair about a rapid-fire machine versus an animal, if you know what I mean. You

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don't really need an assault weapon with full rock and roll, and a hundred-round clip, not for deer hunting -- not unless you plan on making instant cat food on the spot, and plan on collecting your trophy by the teaspoon and cupful.

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It would be good to find out why it is, in countries with handguns, we Americans are so dead set to kill each other that way, more than happens anywhere else. Do we have a wild west holdover or hangover in time?

It would be good to have clarity on the Second Amendment, and see that there's been rabid protection for only half of the verbiage concerning our *Gawd-given rights to blow things away*, while ignoring the other half regarding militias.

It would be good to survey our own scene, and see why it is life is so cheap, and why that idea's demonstrated in our country every single day in all that we do.

It would be good to find out how we can make mental health counseling as available and as all-American for all, as it is to walk into a gun show and walk out ready for a private war.

It would be good to take a multi-pronged approach here, going a step at a time, and being willing to make adjustments and change where needed.

It would be good to admit that, so far, we seem to be doing just about everything wrong, then take it from there.

It would be good to get the hijacked and shanghaied public discourse back on track for safe, sane solutions, not just more hollow-pointed posing.

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It would be good to listen to each other shooting off our mouths on what we think is the best way to go -- maybe by community, who knows? -- rather than waiting for someone to get sideways in life, all pent up, and start shooting off more than a little steam.

It would be good to start taking inventory on exactly how many unwieldy, overly sensitive, sore (or sore-headed) grab-holds there are on this topic, as there are surely too many by half. Unless someone invents telepathy and mind-reading soon, we're going to have to puzzle this one out, and out loud.

It would be good to go a step at a time, bit by bit, by trial and error, backing and filling the whole way -- like everything else of value that humans decide to do.

The thing is the goal, stopping these killings from happening in the first place. The other thing is to start, like we really mean it.

And remembering that the goal is more important than how we get there and getting hung up on that, like we usually do.

Drawing class, or just drawing down:

<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/teachers-armed-guns-texas-school-article-1.1224257>

What's hotter? <http://news.discovery.com/earth/is-lightning-hotter-than-the-sun.html>

We're number one: <http://twitter.com/Aagan86/statuses/279840620531564544>

China school stabbings: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2248054/China-stabbing-22-children-elderly-woman-stabbed-outside-primary-school-Chinese-knifeman.html>

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Sign of the times:

<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/high-powered-rifle-sandy-hook-school-va-article-1.1224327>

Teabagger tweet: http://www.salon.com/2012/12/19/dumb_tweet_of_the_day_on_guns_and_climate_change/?source=newsletter

Jon's fault: http://www.salon.com/2012/12/19/right_wing_author_jon_stewart_part_of_the_culture_that_led_to_shootings/?source=newsletter

Feminism's guilty: http://www.salon.com/2012/12/20/how_feminism_caused_sandy_hook_according_to_the_right/?source=newsletter

Christmas bonus for gun dealers this year:

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/newtown-massacre-us-races-to-stock-up-on-weapons-ahead-of-potential-new-federal-ban-8427976.html>

Tarantino: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-20695365>