

Bill Rea ? No easy answers

Last week's dreadful events at a Florida high school certainly were felt here. Schools in this area were flying their flags at half-staff in tribute to the victims of the massacre. And the real tragedy is, alas, that is all anyone can really do at a time like this.

I found it a small comfort that the person who is believed to be behind this tragedy was not killed. A suspect was taken alive and is now in custody. True, we have to work on the assumption that he allegedly is responsible for this act. Authorities in Florida are obligated to go through due process, making sure all of the suspect's rights are respected. But if it turns out he is the one who did the killings, there will be the opportunity to delve into what led to these acts, and maybe get some understanding on what can be done to avoid them in the future. Too often, we hear of incidents like this in which the shooter is either killed by the authorities, or they take their own life. It seems suicide is frequently part of the agenda of such occurrences, making it difficult to explore what prompted events.

I grant that there's a lot of wishful thinking in the words I just wrote, because there is no such thing as a simple solution to what took place last week. And I don't know to whom we can turn for guidance.

There are those who might argue this is something for government to address, presumably by passing new laws. But can that really solve anything? Just because there are laws in place doesn't mean they are going to prevent bad things from happening. It is already against the law to take guns into schools and open fire on students, yet it happens, and too frequently for anyone's comfort. We have the examples of Columbine and Sandy Hook. Last week was just the latest one, and there have been incidents in Canada too. I fear there will be more.

These incidents also always spark talk about gun control and the availability of fire arms. It would be nice if guns could be kept out of the hands of people like this, but it's not very realistic, especially in the United States.

?A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.?

I lifted that line directly from the Constitution of the United States (I even left in, against my better judgement, some capital letters I deemed inappropriate). It's the Second Amendment, and the last half represents a sentiment that many Americans adhere to.

I think a lot of people have to wonder if the framers of the Constitution and the men who wrote that amendment envisioned a situation that presented itself in Florida last week. But the fact is many people in that country cleve to the words as they are written, and they carry enough clout to keep things as they are

Besides, would controlling who can legally possess a gun make that much of a difference? It upsets me, but I believe it is reality that anyone in Canada or the United States could easily get their hands on a gun if they really wanted to. That's not the problem. It's what happens next that we have to be worried about.

The answer is not new laws or legislation. Solving this problem is much, much more complicated. There is a need to understand why people commit such acts. And there are lots of them who do. That is one of the great tragedies connected with these events; they keep happening.

There are plenty of unstable people in this world, and most of us encounter a few as we progress through life. Most are harmless, but others are not, and how are the rest of us to know what extremes one person might go to?

My reading tells me the two young men responsible for what went on a Columbine were bullied. There was a time in my youth when I was bullied a lot. The physical stuff wasn't too bad. Bruises heal. It was the constant taunting, being ostracized, having my possessions damaged or stolen, and the persistent threats that really made life miserable.

But nothing in life is permanent. Things change, as do social dynamics. In time, I found myself part of a crowd, and we had people we could taunt. High school kids like to think they are empathetic, but not many are. Besides, I had been on the receiving end of much of that garbage for years. I was entitled to have some time on the other side.

One of the targets of my group lashed out by threatening to kill me. I was not his only tormentor, but I was the object of his threats. And this guy was well known enough to the school administration. He was a loud-mouthed, ill-disciplined pot-stirrer (like a lot of other kids his age). And drugs were almost certainly playing a part too. His bombast was his undoing. Action was started, involving faculty, my parents, police, etc.

In the end, nothing came of it. Indeed, we bumped into each other a couple of years later, and the meeting was rather cordial. If memory serves, he even bummed a cigarette off me (I smoked in those days).

Those last couple of paragraphs were difficult for me to write, because I forced myself to reflect back on trying to navigate through adolescence, while crashing into people trying to do the same.

I compare what went on in Florida to what I went through.

It was this guy's mouthing off about killing me that probably worked in my favour. It's the ones who don't mouth off that we have to worry about.

Who's got a solution?

