

Names are newsworthy too

EDITORIAL

IT WAS INTERESTING when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau last week asked media outlets to refrain from naming the individual responsible for the deadliest mass shooting in Canadian history.

The events that transpired in Nova Scotia on April 18 and 19 sent shockwaves across the nation. In total, 22 people were killed and three more injured before the RCMP caught up with the lone perpetrator and, following a brief stand-off, gunned him down. The incident comes at a time when Canadians, maybe not physically but certainly emotionally, are coming together to fight the COVID-19 crisis.

In the days since the shootings, law enforcement has tried to break down, and understand why this happened. It's now confirmed that many of the first victims were known to the shooter, but, as time went on, there was more of a senseless randomness to the killings.

As to that request from the Prime Minister, you will notice we have, in fact, refrained from using the shooter's name ? for now.

?Do not give this person the gift of infamy,? Mr. Trudeau remarked.

He raises an interesting point. While there has been nothing to suggest this animal carried out these heinous acts as a way of etching his name into the annals of history, there have certainly been instances over the past 20 or 30 years where individuals have perpetrated extreme acts of violence simply to have their names known and remembered for years to come.

Instantly, the 2017 Las Vegas shooting springs to mind. There, a lone gunman opened fire on concert-goers at the Route 91 Harvest music festival on the Las Vegas strip ? killing 58 and injuring 413. The horrific massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in 2012, where 27 people were killed, many of them young children, is another. In both cases, there appeared to be little, or no motive behind the acts.

Other well-documented incidents in recent times include the 2016 Orlando nightclub shooting (58 victims), the 2019 mosque shootings in Christchurch, New Zealand (51 victims) and the 2011 Norway attacks (77 victims). But, in each of those incidents, the perpetrators clearly held significant prejudicial, terrorist or political agendas, aside from any desire to go down in infamy.

Despite the despicable and horrific nature of these incidents, and the incredible detail they were each reported on both at the time and the weeks and months following, nobody in the Citizen newsroom could recall the names of those responsible. It was only after a quick search on Google that the perpetrators were identified. At least for us, it is the acts themselves that we remember, and not necessarily the people behind them.

That's not to say the prime minister was wrong, or out of line for making his request. In many ways, it does make sense. Why give someone who did something so terrible, as Mr. Trudeau so aptly put it, the gift of infamy. Of being remembered.

But what if that were to happen? For argument's sake, what if mainstream media obliged and chose not to name, or identify people behind such horrible crimes? Would you, the general public, be okay with that? Human beings are curious by nature. We have a thirst for learning. For knowing things. For knowing everything.

And, aside from that, where do you draw the line? Is there really a difference between those who carry out these massacres and other, more renowned monsters, such as Ted Bundy, or Paul Bernardo? What about Orangeville's own ?House Hermit' David Snow, who murdered at least two people in 1991? Would you be comfortable knowing everything about the crime, yet nothing about those responsible?

We suggest, that while it's certainly not the type of news we, or any other media company, enjoys sharing, the names of people behind such crimes is, in fact, news. While Gabriel Wortman will forever have his name attached to the killings in Nova Scotia, we reject the notion that using his name today means his memory, or legacy will live on at the forefront of people's minds forever. If you don't believe us, pull out a pen and paper and try writing down the names of those responsible for some of the previously aforementioned atrocities, in Norway, Las Vegas, Orlando and Christchurch, without searching online.

We'll wait.