

Reprise: School Violence

In 1999, when the shooting at Columbine occurred, our presidents' article in the UPC newsletter addressed school violence. We wrote:

"...we cannot build walls high enough, fences thick enough, nor gates strong enough around our schools to keep evil out. We can demand stricter gun laws on automatic and semi-automatic weapons. We can demand early intervention/prevention programs and guidance counselors in our elementary schools. (Some researchers posit that based on fifth grade behavior, teenage violence can be predicted with 80% accuracy.) We can demand the entertainment industry stop glorifying violence. (Attorney General, Janet Reno, noted that by the time a child reaches the 8th grade, he/she has witnessed more than 8,000, made-for-TV, murders and over 100,000 acts of violence.)"

*...we believe the words public education mean just that! We cannot expect to drop off our children at school for 180 days and then pronounce them educated. The school cannot be solely responsible for curing evil; it takes all of us. The home, the school, the churches, the youth organizations, the rec programs, the politicians, and **the public** to educate our children in a safe and secure environment."*

Incidents of school violence have risen since the fatal Columbine event. Most of us watched with anguish and fear the horrific event at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Again, we wondered, "Are our children safe?"

Unfortunately, there is no definitive answer to the question. It is reminiscent of the old adage; "it doesn't do much good to close the barn door after the cows get out." Following the December tragedy at Sandy Hook, a myriad of proposals were offered—some cogent—some "knee-jerk." Do I dare ask why it took over ten years to advance the conversation? Why Virginia Tech, etc. etc. etc.?

Let it be clear, I do not want to trash the Second Amendment. Hunters are certainly entitled to enjoy their sport, but I suspect hunters do not need an UZI or other automatic assault rifle to bring down a partridge in a pear tree. And I suspect, they were taught gun safety and gun respect at an early age. Police officers undergo countless hours of weapon training; they are taught to diffuse potentially dangerous situations without rapidly firing 100 bullets. Yet, in reaction to school violence, some are advocating arming the teachers and the principals. Who is going to bear the cost of their training? Others suggest a uniformed, police officer on every campus will solve the problem. I suspect not; one, lone officer facing a barrage of gunfire?

The conversation should begin on several fronts. What can be done about improving the mental health care system? What can be done for children who live in abusive environments? And what can be done to remove automatic assault guns from our streets? Powerful lobbies ante-up enormous sums of money to thwart attempts at gun control. However, it is time for a conversation.

*"...we must reaffirm these victims of senseless violence are **our** children. As parents, it is our responsibility to nurture, to guide, to counsel, to discipline, to mentor, to love, and to protect them from harm. For if we don't, who will?"*