

## 12-21-12 A Horrific Tragedy

Is there anything more tragic than the death of a child? Is there anything more horrific than the murder of children and their caregivers? I am in mourning for the parents, families and town and all impacted by the previously unimaginable act of horror that took place last Friday in Sandy Hook, CT.

I am still personally traumatized by the news because when I was first told, my co-worker had just received a call and did not know the town in Connecticut and, so, it was not mentioned; only the gory statistics, begun with a mournful cry of "Oh, my God!" I cried and shook as I begged for someone else to please look up the town. I have grandchildren in Connecticut and for those moments, as my co-worker was searching for the location, it seemed an eternity as I waited to hear whether or not my grandchildren might have been murdered. For me, it was a chilling brush with the unimaginable. I still find myself waking up in the middle of the night, thinking of my grandchildren, and wondering how the families who lost their children are expected to cope with the reality of it all.

There has also begun and will continue for a very long time, a ripple effect of traumas upon others, both direct and vicarious. It has begun to creep like poison into kitchens, classrooms and cruisers. There are the emergency responders who will be haunted by what they saw, weren't able to stop and by what they had to document. My son in law CT State Trooper may have been spared that gruesome duty first hand but, as the friend and co-worker of those who weren't, he is in pain for them all. As for children, usually I would say that children are resilient, and, on the whole, they are; but, in this case, how can the survivors not be scarred? How do they return to school? The nearby towns, including where another daughter's friend and her husband are newly married young teachers, will wonder about how close they were and what happens to one, could so easily have happened to another. The children in Connecticut will eventually learn of this horrible thing, be full of questions and many will be vicariously traumatized. Families, schools, committees, boards and academies across the country will wonder if there is anything that can be done to prevent such a gruesome thing from happening again. Churches will mourn the loss and pray for the survivors.

It is truly a national tragedy worthy of national attention; not attention of the disrespectful or sensational type but an examination that will lead to any kind or some measure of improvement or hope.

I have hopes. I hope that people will keep their guns locked and separated from the locked ammunition. I hope that people will speak up when there are concerns about the deteriorating mental state of someone they know and do all they can to get help. I hope that when schools and police ask for funding for radios and emergency preparedness training, that it is provided and the need appreciated. I hope that the fields of psychology and grief counseling are appreciated, for people need to prepare but they also need to heal. I hope that adults will

shield their children from unnecessary knowledge of world news, current events, violence and adult content. Talk and play with your children; don't leave them in front of the television.

I also wonder. I can't yet share what I wonder about, as to how this will play out. The thoughts and speculations are too scary. I'd rather focus on my hopes.

Locally, my hopes are based on some facts. The schools have security measures in place and they keep the doors locked. While these practices may not prevent a familiar face from entering a school or prevent a forced entry, practicing what to do when a school is in danger can sometimes prevent a tragedy and/or at least reduce the amount and level of it. The Halifax Elementary School, for instance, has 360 degree video footage of all rooms, including janitorial storage areas. That's been in place for years so that, just in case, police could plan from the outside in response to what was happening on the inside. Our Police Chief arranged that with a grant and always wanted to "upgrade" it with live video feed. He was ahead of his time with that idea. Kudos to him for materializing phase I and conceptualizing phase II!

Recently, the Halifax Elementary School practiced their emergency response drill. I have a feeling that if anyone doubted its usefulness at the time, they went to bed knowing with certainty that practicing the response is the best they can do.

*Cathleen Drinan is the health agent for Halifax, MA. You can contact her at 781 293 6768 or [cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us](mailto:cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us)*