

H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

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Concealed Carry:  
Not Such A Bad Idea After All

The mass murder at the Batman premiere is a tragedy of epic proportion. I cannot begin to fathom what was in that guy's mind that would make a slaughter like that an appropriate thing to do. I guess he got caught up in the Batman myth and wanted it to become his reality. It's no fun being one of the good guys and trying to protect innocent civilians so he had to be one of the bad guys who attacks innocent people. Did anyone notice that this coincided with the one-year anniversary of the mass murder in Norway? I suspect that the date was not a coincidence.

One thing that occurred to me was that he went into that theater knowing he would be butchering an unarmed crowd. What would the outcome have been if some of those movie-goers had permits to carry concealed weapons and went to the movie armed? One shot could have ended the bloody massacre. Many lives could have been saved, many critically wounded people could have been spared. More importantly, the killer may not have even attempted it if he had known he'd be facing armed opponents. He went there knowing he would not experience return fire.

In Wisconsin, the legislature recently enacted a concealed carry law and tens of thousands of citizens applied for permits. I was very skeptical of this law because it self-selects those people who are most fearful. In other words, a paranoid person who thinks everyone is out to get him or her is most likely to apply for a permit to carry a gun. It doesn't matter if the belief is delusional, as long as there is no criminal or mental health record, a gun permit can be obtained.

If I had been in that theater when the gunman opened up, I would have been very thankful for anyone who had a gun and could shoot back. One bullet from one concealed weapon could have made the difference between a minor incident and the massacre that occurred. If the gunman was not hit, just receiving return fire may have scared him off. In my opinion, only a coward would attack an unarmed crowd with weapons.

I had believed that the ubiquity of cell phone cameras would prevent many crimes because most perpetrators want to get away with their crimes. Knowing that any witnesses can take a photo and email it immediately could potentially discourage many would-be criminals. But this view doesn't take into account the wackos who know they are going to get caught and are intent on establishing their notoriety by committing an atrocity.

So I reluctantly conclude that the potential for preventing harm outweighs the likelihood that a lawful gun-toter is going to shoot first and ask questions later. It's a "greater good" sort of argument. Creating a society that allows freedom yet keeps us safe requires that somebody be able to stop attacks when they occur but does not turn us into a police state with cops on every corner.

This brings to mind the 9/11 tragedy. We, as a society, were taken by surprise at what occurred. But my feeling as I saw the twin towers crumble was that we'd never have another successful plane hijacking again. That's not because terrorists wouldn't attempt it, but because every person on every plane would know that his or her only chance of surviving a hijacking would be to stop the hijacker. In other words, every person on a hijacked plane would risk his or her life to stop a hijacker rather than face certain death if the hijacker succeeded. And every hijacker would know that he or she must kill every passenger before a plane could be successfully hijacked.

But I guess my reasoning was not in line with everybody else because we ended up with the Patriot Act and Homeland Security - two of what I consider the worst abuses of governmental power to ever occur in the United States. We haven't had another successful terrorist attack since 9/11 but I'm not sure that we needed all the restrictions on our freedoms that were implement in order to keep us safe. The only time I'm in agreement with unrestrained exercise of governmental power is to rein in corporations and that's the only time politicians want to exercise restraint. I guess I'm out of sync on that issue, too.