

H A R L A N R I C H A R D S

December 26, 2012

Safer On Inside

Since the Sandy Hook massacre the media has focussed on the thousands of people killed in the U.S. by guns. The debate is raging over how many laws to pass to make our country safe.

In my opinion, guns are not the problem, mental illness is. Letting mentally ill people have access to guns is the reason we have so many massacres in the U.S. My suggestion: require every person who wants to own a gun to take a MMPI (Minnesota Multiphase Personality Inventory) and undergo an hour-long evaluation by a psychologist. Based on the results, the psychologist would issue a certificate of eligibility to own a firearm. This process would prevent many unsuitable people from owning guns.

In the Wisconsin prison system, we don't have to worry about crazed killers. That seems counterintuitive. After all, prison is where all the convicted killers are sent. In the entire history of the Wisconsin prison system there have only been 3 documented instances of one prisoner killing another - all of which occurred in the last 40 years. I know this because I read all of the bi-annual reports of the Wisconsin prison system dating back to the prison's creation in the 1850s.

When I heard about Sandy Hook, I wrote to the warden and asked him to set up an account so we prisoners could donate money to the families of victims. Within 2 days over \$1,000 was donated. That says a lot when the average wage here is 26¢ an hour.

But getting back to gun control, one problem with increased legislation is that many people who believe strongly in their right to bear arms are single-issue voters. In other words, they'll vote for whoever opposes gun control laws regardless of what other policies that candidate supports. That's how Democrats lost so much support among white males. For many of them, gun rights trump everything else. If you start passing gun laws you alienate these people even though they agree with you on every other issue.

The Sandy Hook massacre was a terrible tragedy caused by a mentally ill person who should never have been allowed near a gun. Bear in mind that, just like the theater shooter a few

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months ago, he went out to kill unarmed people. Had one of those teachers been carrying a gun - or even permitted to carry a gun - he would not have gone to that school to kill children. Psychos like him do not have the courage to take on another armed person. They go where they know everyone will be unarmed to commit mass murder. The greater number of sane, law-abiding citizens we have carrying guns, the fewer massacres we will have. And the fewer gun-free zones, the safer we will all be from mentally ill mass murderers.

The impact of this massacre was brought home to me at the Salvation Army church service on the Saturday night after it happened. The woman spoke about the tragedy and pointed out that many of those parents bought Christmas presents for their children and she wondered about how those parents must be feeling sitting at home, missing the happy chatter of their lost child. I thought to myself, what will they do with the gifts? How can they give them away or bear to keep them? Every Christmas from now on will bring with it the agony and grief of this holiday season. I wanted to cry, to reach out somehow to ease their suffering.

All I can do is pray for them and ask the Lord to help them through this ordeal.