**On the Anniversary of a Massacre**

Dr. Todd Huffman, for the Eugene *Register-Guard*

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Anniversaries are the days during which we are prompted to celebrate, mourn, or reflect upon an event all other days the busyness of life overwhelms us to forget. Necessary, this calendar alarm clock, else we might sleep through our past – its loves, losses, and lessons.

Soon sounds a terrible anniversary through which we’d just as soon hibernate. One year ago this December 14th a country busy at holiday shopping was stunned by the grisly harvest of twenty elementary school students and six adults by a disturbed grim reaper armed to the teeth with semi-automatic scythes. The second-worst massacre of children in American history, and yet another mass shooting that left our nation winded with grief.

This is no gun banning rant, however. In this time in our history banning guns wholesale is a fool’s errand. A nation as a whole moved by the slaughter in Newton to increase the presence of armed guards at recess and armed teachers at writing and arithmetic is a nation unflinchingly devoted to gun rights.

An American individual’s right to bear arms is secure. The debate on gun ownership was settled long ago. Despite the misplaced fear of some of gun confiscation by an out-of-control government, the clear reality after Sandy Hook is that no event, politician, or crusader could alter the 21st-century American way of life: life, liberty, and the pursuit of a gun in every nightstand and classroom.

Most gun owners are responsible people. Many are military veterans with a deep and abiding love of and loyalty to this country. Most are not part of a militia. Most do not stockpile exorbitant amounts of ammunition, or train for guerilla action, or own fully or semi-automatic weapons.

Most view guns as tools for hunting, target shooting, or self-protection. Most keep their firearms secure, and teach their children about gun safety. All believe that our nation was built on individual freedoms, including the right to own guns. All believe guns to be an important part of our culture and heritage.

And most gun owners believe there is a balance between rights and responsibilities, and a place for modest loophole-less restrictions, such as background checks to weed out criminals and crazy people, prohibition of gun possession by individuals who have been convicted of violent misdemeanors, and waiting periods to allow angry people to calm down.

Some even agree that there exists no place outside of the military or police for assault weapons made for the sole purpose of war.

Would such restrictions prevent mass shootings in a society saturated with a private arsenal of over 300 million guns? No one pretends that smarter gun laws would prevent all monstrous bloodshed, not in a society whose violent nature is evidenced by its insatiable media appetite for munitions mayhem. Not in a society so lackadaisical at caring for its mentally ill that it grants them easy access to weapons of terrible destructive power.

And not in a society with an entertainment industry only too happy to profit billions from marketing violence to children and young adults, and with millions of overworked parents only too happy to allow unmonitored access to all forms of media for endless hours each week.

Something has to change. How many more installments of “Assault Weapon Rampage” must we witness? How many more fresh crops of young lives cut short? How many more years of almost three thousand American children and teens killed by firearms, an annual 9/11 in our homes and neighborhoods and schoolyards?

We need more than fleeting headlines, momentary outrage, tears and talk. We need a little less concern for gun control and a little more concern for massacre control. Yes, people kill people, but the unparalleled ease with which people buy death-dealing weapons in this country makes it all too gruesomely easy.

Banning guns wholesale is not an option, nor is it necessary. But a sea change in our societal attitudes towards military-style guns, media violence, mental health care, and the unfettered access millions of children have to guns in their own homes is essential if we are ever to stem the rising red tide of firearm-related death and injury. Else we will mark many more such anniversaries as this one.