

Seasonal Seasonings

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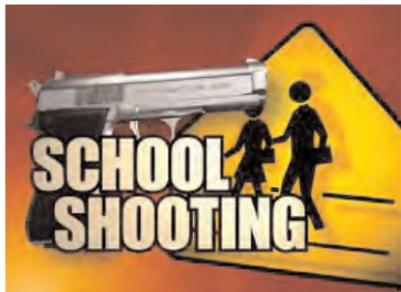
School Violence: An Educator's Perspective

Happy New Year? It's January. Time for a fresh start, but for many people it's not fresh; it's rotten, absolutely rancid. Why? Two words: Sandy Hook. This January seasonings will not be coated with sprinkles and powdered sugar. It's dipped in a solution of black pepper and lemon juice.

I'm talking about school violence. My educational career followed this path. I started teaching in a York county junior high school in 1973. Twelve years with 12 year olds was a great way to begin my career. I transferred to the high school in 1986 and spent the next 20 years teaching sophomores and seniors. During my last 6 years at the high school, I was hired as an adjunct professor at York College and would teach a night class after a day at the high school. In 2006, I retired from the public school and picked up two additional classes at the College. My last six years were spent teaching college students. I could not have scripted my educational career any better.

School violence. That term has worn many caps in the last five decades. From a fourth grader shooting a rubber band at his buddy, through two ninth graders beating the crap out of each other in the cafeteria, to the senseless massacre of educators and innocent 6 and 7 year olds who never got to open their presents Santa was ready to put under the Christmas tree.

There's a 16th century proverb that comes to mind. "Desperate times call for desperate measures." My research for this essay comes from verified and cited sources. There are many more reports of school violence and shooting online, but those reports are not cited or verified, so until they are, I will not consider them valid and/or the truth.



Historically, deadly school violence first occurred in 1927 with a suicide bombing in Michigan that killed 45 people. In 1966, there was one event in Texas with 16 deaths. Ironically, the decade of the 1950s which was probably the first decade associated with rebellious teenagers due to "rock and roll" music did not have a reported incident.

During the 1970s, there were seven events which resulted in 16 deaths, and the 1980s saw nine events with 14 deaths. It was the decade of the 1990s when school shootings skyrocketed. The number of events almost tripled, numbering 31, and the deaths more than quadrupled as the fatalities reached 66. In 1999, the Columbine High school attack resulted in 15 deaths. This historic school massacre will be mixed in with the infamous answers when America asks these questions: "Where were you when you

heard about...." (You complete the question with these horrific phrases), the assassination of JFK, the afternoon O.J. Simpson tried to elude the police, the space Challenger exploding, Michael Jackson dying, and the terrorist attack on 911?

Shootings continue to rise. The 1990s had 31 events; the 2000s had 49 events which is a 63% increase of school violence. The deaths dropped slightly from 99 to 91, but with a 63%



of increase of deadly events, America was lucky that fatalities were not higher.

Last week, we celebrated the brand new year of 2013. With only three years of this new decade behind us, we have already had 27 events which claimed 61 lives. Two-thirds of the decade stands before us leaving more than six years to go. At this rate, we may have just hit the tip of the school-shooting iceberg of 2013.

The end of the 1990s ushered in the new millennium with 15 dead from the Columbine High School shooting. In 2006, six died in the Nickle Mines elementary attack in Amish country. The following year, 33 men and women lost their lives at Virginia Tech. Last month, December 2012, twenty seven people, mostly first graders, died at Sandy Hook. School shootings have occurred at every educational level. How long will America accept these senseless tragedies? Has our nation become desensitized to human life?

We seem to care. We cry, we set up shrines, we congregate to pray, we provide grief counseling, we embrace one another, we set up rules after the fact. We do a lot of things to make the educational world safer. Schools and colleges are always trying to make their institutions even more safe; is it working? There's an old saying, "If we outlaw guns, only outlaws will have guns." So, do we allow teachers to have a revolver in their desk drawer? No, I don't believe we should do that. Public schools are suppose to be a safe haven for Americas kids. Parents entrust our schools to operate "in loco parentis," a Latin term which refers to individuals (teachers, principals, administrators, school board members) who assume parental status and responsibility for their children with the ultimate goal being to preserve the children's safety so they can return to mom and dad.

I wish I had the answer. I wish someone had the answer. I'm not sure there is an answer, but we must keep trying to figure it out, examine and study what evidence and facts we do have. Unfortunately, reality shows us that the rash of school violence is still climbing, and I'm afraid it may get worse before it gets better. I hope I am totally wrong.