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PERSPECTIVE

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Shoot first — ask questions later

By Julie L. Kessler



Wayne LaPierre, executive vice president and principal spokesman of the National Rifle Association, speaks at the NRA's annual convention in Houston, May 3, 2013.

The New York Times

By most accounts, my husband and I have reached that golden moment in time. Our two youngest children are graduating from high school and both were accepted to their first choice, albeit highly overpriced, east coast universities. And both teens have secured summer jobs. To celebrate our great milestone as official empty nesters, we are planning our first off season vacation to East Africa to coincide with the end of the great migration. It should be grand; a trip of a lifetime, the gift to ourselves after years and years of juggling the hard work of simultaneously lawyering and parenting. No doubt the lions and cubs will be charming, the wildebeests running, and the giraffes majestic. The screaming hyenas perhaps, not so much.

Cultural Commentary

Honestly, and as exciting as all this is, we are having a bit of trouble adjusting to the new normal. And by that I mean where you wake up to learn that instead of honoring over the Memorial Day weekend those fallen soldiers who fought to preserve our freedoms, you need to start mourning because there has been yet another mass shooting of our youth, by yet another mentally compromised individual. By one who had unfettered access to firearms and hundreds of rounds of ammunition, and apparently the cash to amass them. This time in Isla Vista, near UC Santa Barbara, and this time, seven dead, including the shooter, with an additional 13 wounded.

It has been only 16 months since the horrors of Sandy Hook where 20 little children and eight adults were killed, including the shooter and his mother. Sandy Hook, of course, was only five months after the Aurora, Colo., massacre, where another mentally ill college student who was massively armed, murdered 12 people and injured 58. I could go on and on as 2012 and 2013 saw record numbers of mass shootings and murders by deranged individuals. Malls, movie theaters, army bases, the Empire State Building, the Washington Navy Yard, a Sikh temple on the east coast. But I won't. The picture is, sadly, crystal clear.

Following Sandy Hook, and as expected, the National Rifle Association, and its official mouthpiece, Wayne LaPierre, offered up some grand solutions to the mass shooting problem, such as arming school teachers and school officials in order to combat potential shooters. Really? I just cannot believe that I didn't think of that first. After

all, can't you just picture K-1 teacher Miss Jones going from an off-key rendition of "Mary Had a Little Lamb," "Itsy Bitsy Spider" and the ABCs, to blowing out a shooter's brains right in front of all of her 5-year-old charges? Would they then close

circle and engage in a kiddie chorus of "Kumbaya"? Without a doubt, this would be in keeping with LaPierre's other moronic spewings of undeniably baseless arguments that stem from the NRA's unofficial slogan that "Guns don't kill people, people do."

It must be so very comforting to LaPierre and his ilk to live in a world so completely devoid of elementary physics. However, in the world I inhabit, elementary physics do in fact play a role. Thus, an actual, real live person must buy a gun and the proper ammunition, load it, aim it, and then shoot at his or her targets. Death or grave bodily injury often being the activity's outcome. That said, I have never met a person that could shoot, maim, and kill others without an actual gun. I'm guessing that elementary physics may play a role in that as well. By the same token, I have

never met a gun that purchased and loaded itself, aimed, and killed people without an actual human handler. Just saying.

So perhaps (and it pains me deeply to type these words), Lapierre is dead right after all with the NRA's unofficial slogan. With this twisted and utterly perverse logic — and I'm certain he is unaware of it — Lapierre is, in effect, actually advocating gun control. If guns don't kill, but people do, then clearly we must restrict the people, especially the mentally ill ones, from obtaining guns. Now that's logical.

It's a fact that the NRA possesses an obscenely well-funded and highly effective arm-twisting lobby. Following the Sandy Hook mass murders and the public out roar and outrage that ensued, Lapierre's rhetoric was in stereo and constantly all over the media. Following the Isla Vista massacre however, Lapierre and the NRA has been deafeningly quiet. I'm not sure what to make of this other than perhaps Lapierre has decided to jump ship. A woman can dream, can't she?

Here's what we do know. Background checks simply don't work. The Isla Vista and Sandy Hook shooters both proved that. We also know that placing limits on ammunition amounts probably won't work either. Saddest of all perhaps, is that there is no safeguard against garden variety insanity and the shooters who are willing to die in the midst of their murderous rampages. Therefore, since the vast majority of mass shooting deaths occur with legally purchased arms and ammunition, who are the insane ones in this undeniably sad equation? The sociopathic shooters or the society which freely arms them?

This, of course, is not particularly about the Second Amendment. However, if one is going to argue — as many do — that the Second Amendment must permit the public's right to bear arms, even apparently the clearly insane members of that public, as opposed to its theoretically anyway, more sane militia, then it seems to me that perhaps another amendment is in order. Perhaps next Memorial Day, when I go to the VA Cemetery to lay some flowers on my father's grave, I will contemplate that question.

In the meantime, I will continue to plan the East Africa trip. And while there I may learn that the laws of the jungle make more sense to me than some of the laws we have here in the "civilized" human world. I will also take pride in my graduating seniors for a job well done and pray to anyone listening that they and their two siblings all make it through university life and onward, out of harm's way, with their lives intact. Here's hoping. Though frankly, this may be more like playing Russian roulette with a fully loaded chamber. It hardly seems the way normal people in a civilized society should go about living their lives. The new normal indeed.

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