

Time to reflect on the recent past

By Julie L. Kessler

Over the weekend, along with eating turkey, giving thanks and the end for many of the fiscal year, starts the season of reflecting on the recent past. The good of course is sometimes easy to forget; the bad and the ugly, not so much.

On Sept. 21, 2013, a mass killing occurred by Al-Shabab gunmen at the upscale Westgate Mall in downtown Nairobi, Kenya, which left over 60 dead. Just four days before that in Washington, D.C., a mentally unstable navy reservist and contractor with a security access clearance opened fire in a U.S. Navy yard leaving 12 dead and many wounded. On Dec. 14, 2012, a disturbed young man shot and killed his mother then fatally shot 20 children, six adults, and finally, himself at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., leaving that small hamlet forever altered. On Aug. 24, 2012, a downsized employee shot and killed his former boss outside the Empire State Building in New York. While the police shot and killed that shooter, nine bystanders were wounded in the process. That was also the day that Anders Breivik, the Norwegian man who murdered 77 people, most of them adolescents, in 2011 was finally sentenced in Oslo. On Aug. 5, 2012, an army veteran and neo-Nazi murdered six Sikhs in their temple near Milwaukee, Wis., while they were there doing charitable work, and injured three others, including a police officer. And July 21, 2012, the world woke up to the hideous news that a lone gunman shooting indiscriminately into a crowded movie theater in Aurora, Colo., at a midnight screening of "The Dark Knight Rises" and had killed 12 people and wounded 58. I could go on and discuss that on Nov. 5, 2009, a U.S. Army major and licensed psychiatrist fatally shot thirteen people and injured 30 others while on a shooting spree at a military base in Fort Hood, Texas, but I won't. The mass murderous picture is quite clear.

It seems that all that can be done at this point while shaking one's

head practically to the point of self-induced whiplash is to ask the very basic question: What on earth is going on? This, of course, is not particularly about the Second Amendment or gun control. The National Rifle Association possesses a ludicrously well-funded and effective arm-twisting lobby, and its official mouthpiece, Wayne Lapierre, often utters incredibly baseless arguments that stem from the NRA's unofficial

zis, a mentally ill neuroscience student, or jihadists murdering under color of Islam. Instead, it appears to be about the absolute abdication of any semblance of "normal" in humanity's current social discourse, domestic or abroad.

While a dozen Ph.D. candidates in psychology could discuss ad nauseum the concept of today's "normal" and perhaps not come to any semblance of agreement, one

fire the incompetent employee, were not born the offending skin color or religion du jour, or simply were not in the wrong place at the wrong time. And we go on, with just a little less normalcy and a lot more instability in our lives.

That we do this is natural and normal. How else could we function in a world apparently gone horribly mad? That we have constantly to face and deal with a never-ending barrage of the sad and fearful outbursts of the violent or the mentally ill is just not normal. Anywhere. Yet we go on, hoping on a wing and a prayer that we will remain firmly entrenched in Lady Luck's shadowy embrace. Because at the end of the day, that seems to be all that keeps us and our loved ones out of harm's way. However, putting our faith in and depending upon the inherent vagaries of the amorphous Lady Luck to keep us safe in this new normal seems perilous indeed. And it's a bet that appears more akin to playing Russian roulette with a fully loaded chamber, held by those with progressively itchy and unstable fingers, than it does the way normal people in a civilized society go about living their lives.

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slogan that "Guns don't kill, people do." Whether you believe this or not, the fact is that elementary physics mandates that an actual person must load the gun, aim it, and shoot at his or her targets. Just saying.

While the NRA's position and Lapierre's rhetoric are, understandably, highly offensive to many, the sad fact is that Norway has far more stringent gun control laws in place than the U.S. does — and that certainly didn't stop the Norwegian madman from obtaining and using massive and deadly fire power. Nor did it deter him from committing the most heinous gun crime in Norwegian history, and one of the worst in the world; and this is so despite the stiff prison sentence ultimately imposed. Sadder still is that there doesn't seem to be an intelligent answer to the question of just what is happening in our world that such people come out of the woodwork to do such harm. It is not about disgruntled employees, disturbed people, white supremacists, neo-Na-

thing is certain: randomly blowing people's brains out because you are pissed off, stressed out, or otherwise mentally indisposed is most certainly not anywhere near the definition of normal, by anyone's standards. Anywhere on Planet Earth.

What is perhaps sadder still is that we are becoming increasingly inured to these continuing murderous rampages in our midst. It appears that we mortals are becoming callous — even, dare I say, immune — to the regular onslaught of murder and mayhem that surrounds us. A person's first reaction may be, "Oh no!" The second reaction is usually, "How many were killed?" With each murderous episode, though, it seems that we become just a bit quicker to turn around and go back to our own lives, mainly because there is simply no rational way of dealing with this information, which is so inherently irrational. In the process of so rapidly turning back to our lives, we often simultaneously whisper silent prayers of gratitude that we didn't

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