

OPINION

Opinion articles do not necessarily represent the views of the Portland Observer. We welcome reader essays, photos and story ideas. Submit to news@portlandobserver.com.

How Many children Will it Take?

When handguns lead to death and destruction

BY TOM H. HASTINGS

Christina Taylor Green is a message spirit. She arrived on Earth on Sept. 11, 2001, a day when terrorists armed with no more than boxcutters turned jet airliners into guided missiles and slaughtered almost 3,000 people, mostly civilians.

Indeed, she was one of the babies featured in a book, *Faces of Hope*, that looked at one baby from each of the United States born on that day. The third-grader had been elected to her Mesa Verde elementary school student council and was at the meet-up for congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords with a neighbor adult, Susan Hileman. The two were holding hands when gunfire erupted on Jan. 8.

For me, this child's death engenders the question, How many children will it take?

How many children will it take

before the Rush Limbaughs and Sarah Palins stand down from violent imagery and rhetoric? Would it be so hard for them to find language that doesn't evoke killing, shooting and crosshairs? How debilitating to their effectiveness could it be?

Do they believe they would lose followers if they honored the spirit of this child and abjured such language? Do they need the kind of followers who only respond to that imagery?

How many children will it take? How many before those who defend the Second Amendment finally agree that it doesn't apply to handguns, and if it does, it's time to repeal it? Ah, they say, guns don't kill people, people kill people. Yes, but it seems that when given the option, murderers seem to choose handguns, don't they?

Christina was not in fact stabbed, nor was she bombed, nor was she rundown by a malicious driver. She was shot. That was the weapon of choice. A knife-wielding assassin would simply never have been able to kill six and wound 14 more. In a knife attack upon a public figure, Christina would almost certainly

have been a survivor.

Bombs are already outlawed. And how many times each year do murderers run a car into a crowd of people, killing six and injuring so many? We are not going to outlaw cars, since they are not designed to murder and since they transport us to work, to school, to shop, etc.

But handguns are different. Yes, hunters, I see your hands. I am not suggesting your rifles are part of this conversation. Just handguns, and that is what most of us who want to outlaw guns are talking about.

Outlaw handguns. What is so sacred about them? Really?

Who could be against the life of Christina Taylor Green? Or how about the 500 or more children who are killed accidentally by guns annually in the US? Well, you say, I keep my handgun locked. Sure, and do you inspect the homes where your child might go? Should the parents of 4-year old Dylan Jackson have swept the home where their child was at a birthday party, where he found a gun, picked it up and innocently shot himself dead in the chest?

Well, to paraphrase Madeleine

Albright in the late 1990s when asked if the thousands of Iraqi children dying every year because of the deadly sanctions program kept out many crucial medicines, "We think it's worth the price." Is that what handgun lovers believe? That without their handguns, the communist Muslim Obama government would take away their freedoms? Seriously? That, after all, is the stated reason for the Second Amendment, to prevent the government from infringing on the people.

Since the US leads the so-called developed world in gun deaths per hundred thousand citizens, I guess we can safely say it's just lucky we have that Second Amendment, so we aren't oppressed like the Canadians, Scots, Finns and Japanese, all of whom have far lower rates of gun deaths than do we. I guess they are just too protective of their little children, willing to give up liberties to keep them alive. Oh, that's right, the only liberties they give up are the gun rights.

Guns are how we murder in the US (a higher rate amongst the nations studied than any except Colombia, even higher than Guatemala

in terms of percent of murders committed by guns) and how we commit suicide.

They make it easy. We like it easy, and the stories of hurt and killed children have not dented the gun lovers. 16,907 suicides in the US in 2004 were by gun, many of them by teenagers temporarily despondent and highly unlikely to end their lives in any other way.

But there was a gun available, as there was when more than 50,000 lost their lives in the US to guns last year, and the year before, and the year before...even box cutters and jetliners can't approach those mortality numbers.

Really, gun lovers, just be honest. The lives of these children just don't matter much to you once we start talking about the sacred right to own your handgun, eh? Apparently, there is no number, no story of unspeakable tragedy, no little face that can pierce the armor you have around your love for your handguns. I get that. What I don't get is why the rest of us allow it to remain law and public policy.

Tom H. Hastings is director of *Peacevoice*, a program of the *Oregon Peace Institute*.

Sticks and Stones to Guns and Bullets

Taking responsibility for the ways we interact

BY REV. M. LINDA JARAMILLO

Christina Taylor Green was born on Sept. 11, 2001; she was nine years old when she was shot and killed on Jan. 7, 2011. Christina's is the Arizona face in the book, *Faces of Hope* that included one baby from each state born on that fateful day almost 10 years ago.

Today her beautiful smile is on the front page of newspapers and at the center of television screens around the world. Christina had just been elected to her student council

so she wanted to meet her Congresswoman; a young leader whose life was cut short by tragedy in a shopping mall in Tucson, Ariz.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to her parents and extended family who so courageously spoke of her innocent and hopeful spirit. We cannot help but grieve the loss of our children's innocence.

"Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words will never hurt me." I remember this phrase from my childhood; it was how we responded to someone who was calling us names, putting us down, or just being mean. While this response was a way to deflect the pain, it did not really help because words did hurt; we just pretended that they didn't.

Today's children are no different, words still hurt them, but the sticks and stones have turned into guns and bullets.

During sad times like these, we can't help but be angry or lose hope for the future. Every day, we hear voices seemingly intent on proving that anyone who disagrees with "our" point of view is wrong and should be silenced. Most will agree that we live in a time when our profound differences of opinion are escalating from words to much more violent expressions - from sticks and stones to guns and bullets.

Words can be influential instruments of hate and anger that can lodge in the hearts and minds of those who are focused on destruction and despair. Words can also be powerful sources of encouragement

meant for good and kind purposes. The power of suggestion is far more significant than any one of us wants to admit. We must not underestimate the potential that words have to be used as sticks and stones...or guns and bullets.

While our leaders set the example for appropriate and civil behavior, we cannot simply blame our public officials for the culture of hostility in which we live. Each one of us must take responsibility for the ways in which we interact. As adults, we should provide the example to our children on how to resolve differences without violence.

Ironically, just a few days following the Tucson tragedy, we observed the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a public leader who walked among us pleading for a nonviolent response to injustice.

His words ring so true today, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

Regardless of our own perspective on any issue, let's find ways to disagree and even get angry, without resorting to violence. Otherwise our children will see only hate, darkness, and despair rather than love, light and hope.

As we grieve and search for answers to this shooting tragedy, let's remind ourselves that we can and must participate in transforming our current culture of violence to one of care and kindness. Our children deserve nothing less.

Rev. M. Linda Jaramillo is an executive minister in *Justice Ministries for the United Church of Christ*.

The Portland Observer Established 1970

USPS 959-680

4747 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd., Portland, OR 97211

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, PUBLISHER: Charles H. Washington

EDITOR: Michael Leighton

DISTRIBUTION MANAGER: Mark Washington

CREATIVE DIRECTOR: Paul Neufeldt

The Portland Observer welcomes freelance submissions. Manuscripts and photographs should be clearly labeled and will be returned if accompanied by a self addressed envelope. All created design display ads become the sole property of the newspaper and cannot be used in other publications or personal usage without the written consent of the general manager, unless the client has purchased the composition of such ad. © 2008 THE PORTLAND OBSERVER. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT PERMISSION IS PROHIBITED. The Portland Observer—Oregon's Oldest Multicultural Publication—is a member of the National Newspaper Association—Founded in 1885, and The National Advertising Representative Amalgamated Publishers, Inc. New York, NY, and The West Coast Black Publishers Association

CALL 503-288-0033 FAX 503-288-0015

news@portlandobserver.com

ads@portlandobserver.com

subscription@portlandobserver.com

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Portland Observer, PO Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208