

# Careful Among Them English...But Also

BY NIKI T. INGRAM

One of my favorite movies is “Witness,” a murder mystery that takes place in Philadelphia and Lancaster County. The movie stars Harrison Ford as a police officer forced to hide among the Amish. There is a scene where Ford's character is about to leave the safety of the Amish environment and as he prepares to go, the Amish father-in-law warns him “you be careful among them English.” Over the years this line became the good-bye phrase in my family. There are variations on the line at any given time but the key is to stay safe out in the world.

Several years ago, my son lived in the north of England. While he was there I missed him terribly but could not deny the fact that his being there meant that there were several things that I didn't have to worry about, such as the prospect of his being shot and killed by either the police, or as the victim of random gun violence. I didn't realize that those worries were a vague noise in my head until the noise was gone. Because of the scarcity of guns in the U.K., his being the victim of gun violence was a non-issue. I remember thinking about how curious it was that I felt that he was safer there than here. During the year that he was away, Trayvon Martin was murdered. As I grieved for that young man and his family, I distinctly remember being relieved that my son was safe on the “other side of the pond.”

It now seems as if those were the good old days. Since Trayvon's death we have had Sandy Hook, Pulse, the streets of Chicago, Parkland, Mandalay Bay, Santa Fe...the list is seemingly endless, as it grows everyday with more shootings in public places. We have become numb to gun violence and the chaos that it creates. The number of deaths from shootings is staggering and yet we do nothing. Gun deaths are endemic and a public health crisis. For whatever reasons, this is another issue that we cannot talk about

dispassionately, and a solution does not seem likely to me.

We all get locked into our version of what the Constitution says, or doesn't say, and wonder how and if the victims may have done something that caused their own demise. This is harder to do when the victims are children, but we try, nonetheless.

I am not a gun owner now, nor have I ever been one. I have been trying to understand why people feel that they need guns. I have listened, but must admit that I still don't really understand why it is necessary to own a gun. All I see is the havoc they wreak. Their presence does not make me feel safer. In fact, the prevalence of guns makes me warier and more concerned about my safety when I am in public places.

I can't imagine the anguish of parents who send their children to school in the morning and then receive a call or text that there has been a shooting in what should be a safe space for learning. I can't imagine the heartbreak of parents whose children go out on a weekend night and are shot or killed because of random violence. I can't imagine what to do if your child is shot by a police officer or an armed citizen for whatever the articulated reason might be. Dead is dead. Your child is gone, and all the potential of that life evaporates, and the family must deal with the ripple of that loss forever. However, more and more people are arming themselves and at times it feels as if we are living in the Wild West.

Not only is there a human cost to gun violence, there is a societal economic cost. At a recent industry conference, I learned that the cost to the insurance industry of the Mandalay Bay shooting was more than \$1 billion. Perhaps those losses will be the impetus for us to get some type of gun reform.

The good news is that it's summer, and hopefully the number of school shootings will go down for a few months. The bad news is that it's summer, and the number of shootings in this



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city, and others like it, will go up. At the end of a recent telephone conversation with my son, I reminded him to be "careful among them English" but also said "don't go out for Skittles; don't use a cell phone in your grandmother's back yard; don't get stopped by the police, but if you do, turn your phone on and keep your hands visible; don't go to the club; don't go to Bible study; be careful if you go to an Arts Festival; and if you go to a concert, watch for active shooters." It's funny, except when it isn't.

This is my last column as editor-in-chief for this term. I have enjoyed my time as editor and your comments about my writings. I never did the frothy piece that I had planned but one day, I will. Peace out! ■

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