

When murders happen locally we all get a little more concerned about our safety

More to the Story

By Ben Bennett

It may be my imagination but I seem to be reading a lot of stories lately about local people losing their lives through violence.

It has happened in Kitchener, Erin, and here at least a couple of times. Plus, we have had two occasions where someone in the area was shot by police.

In the United States, yet another massacre has taken over the headlines, soon to be replaced by other news – likely the next one.

But the church massacre in Charleston is a little different. In recent years, calls for action on the availability of guns have come to nothing. Even as the US President has ratcheted up the rhetoric to do something, nothing has changed. Such is the madness surrounding this issue that one National Rifleman's Association (NRA) board member suggested worshippers 'might be alive' if they had guns themselves.

This time, in addition to the calls for change in America's gun culture, we are actually seeing more outrage about the Confederate flag. Much in evidence in posed pictures of the shooting suspect, the flag and its associated history and philosophy seem to be part of the young man's radicalization. Suddenly, it is seen as a symbol of evil, even though for years it has been institutionalized into the US culture, flying outside some state buildings and even appearing on licence plates in one state.

The flag has become toxic, and politicians and companies are racing to disassociate themselves from it, a reaction that suggests at least some people sense the public outrage. Too bad we cannot get the same unanimity on firearms.

Canada is well-known as a safe country, and Guelph as a safe community. Violence happens somewhere else. Other than big city gangs going after each other, and domestic situations (no less tragic but not usually seen as affecting public safety as a whole), we can walk the streets with little fear.

Well, apparently not. Lately, we seem to hear more and more stories here about the use of guns. Maybe we need to be a little less complacent about this.

We may not have the same number of warped people this side of the border, given our size and history, but when ordinary situations can get out of hand we really do not want

guns lying around. And our police should know where other weapons might be located if they need to get involved (as police chiefs have pointed out in the past, only to be ignored by a government that knows better).

While the issue of gun control invariably gets passions raised on both sides of the individual rights-versus-public safety argument, it generally remains an academic exercise for most. This allows lots of folks to play politics without any responsibility.

I have always wondered how one political party can make such an issue about public safety when it comes to threats from others, but actively work to make sure those who want to keep guns private can do so – even to the extent of subverting the law. Last month's revelation on the pressure placed on the RCMP to destroy the long gun registry data, even in the face of court rulings to the contrary, is unbelievable for a party with law and order as one of its main platforms.

And the move to fast-track a law making such actions retroactively *not illegal* sounds like something from a bad movie. But it happened. What next, a law retroactively making all the bad stuff we did to First Nations people all right? That would save a bunch of money on treaty settlement and compensation payments.

Of all the recent news of local violence, the murder of a man on Tiffany Street a couple of weeks ago is particularly scary. We won't know the details for a while but this doesn't sound like the kind of thing we can dismiss as something that couldn't possibly happen to us.

It's time to stop the political pandering. If someone is going to have a lethal weapon in their house, they better have a good reason. And they can damn well fill out a form and pay a licence fee.

Let's make this an election issue this fall, because now it is in our backyard.

(Ben Bennett's past columns can be found at www.bbc.guelph.org.)