



AT A GLANCE

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Releasing The Fear

December 2012 Newsletter

Newtown reaction: Release the fear and save lives

By Claudia Martin

Guest Commentary

In the aftermath of the horrific shootings in Newton, Conn., there has been an explosion of finger pointing, blaming, ranting, and speculation. This is our natural response to an incomprehensible and senseless act, to attempt to render it less terrifying by categorizing or analyzing it. Some of our responses have been reasoned and thoughtful; others have been knee jerk expressions of our anger and fear.

As a teacher of six- and seven-year-olds, I have relived in my mind what it must have been like at Sandy Hook Elementary on Friday, and sadly, I can imagine enough to know that no child or adult present in that building will ever have a normal life again, even if they survived. I grieve for all the victims and their families, for all our children and teachers who try to learn in safety after increasing violent events like this one, and for our nation.

The rantings that most disturb me as a teacher are the claims that these events occur because “God is no longer welcome in schools.” As a teacher, every day I see God in every child and in the kindness and caring of staff. Invoking God’s name does not guarantee his presence, but right action does.

In 40 years of public school teaching, I have taught children from families who were Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Atheistic, Agnostic, New Age, Jewish, and other religions, and all of these families wanted the same things for their children: for them to grow up to be skilled, happy, productive, and moral members of society. There could be no greater evidence of God’s presence in Sandy Hook Elementary School than the teachers, principal, and school psychologist’s efforts to shield the children in their care, losing their own lives in doing so.

On April 20, 1999, at a school in Colorado called Columbine Elementary, my friends and I were enjoying the surprise 50th birthday party they gave me at lunchtime, when the frantic calls from parents began to come in after hearing about a shooting at a school called Columbine.

We were not the school of tragedy that day, but it was the beginning of our national tragedy, for which we must find solutions. No one, in spite of our natural tendency to search for them, has all the answers to our questions about these horrific events and how to prevent others like them.

Yes, we need more stringent gun control laws and leaders who have the courage to follow the majority of Americans’ views on this issue, rather than bowing to the powerful NRA lobby.

Yes, we need an overhaul of how we treat and mistreat mental illness and neurological disabilities in our youth, rather than bowing to the pressures of Pharmaceutical companies and their powerful lobbies who push psychiatric drugs that are known to induce violence.

Yes, we need education systems that do not allow troubled youth to slip through the cracks and become isolated and at risk. Yes, we need media and entertainment that do not reward, reinforce and glorify violence. Yes, we need to raise children who have strong moral life-affirming values.

But most of all, we need to recognize that the magnitude of the problem requires our open-minded willingness to look for solutions in a spirit of common good and problem solving, rather than from entrenched and fixed positions. If we are able to release the fear that makes us cling ever tightly to our known ideologies, we might be able to at least begin to save lives.

Claudia Martin has been a friend of mine since I was her son, Ian's special education teacher and then classroom teacher about 25 years ago. I appreciate her sharing her thoughts with us this month. The original posting of this commentary appeared in the Denver Post. [Click here](#) to access it.

I encourage everyone to join the [#26ActsOfKindness](#) movement started by Ann Curry, [click here](#). Just think of the impact of citizens, young and old doing 26 acts of kindness to honor the lives of the children and educators killed in Newton, Connecticut. I'm in, how about you?

- Identify your vision:

Visualize how to celebrate the joys of everyday life and share your gratitude with others.
- Use your voice:

Tell your stories to community leaders, state and national legislators to increase their understanding of your concerns.
- Work together:

Begin a dialog in your community for long term sustainable solutions to the many Issues impacting our children.



Resources

Students who use alternative communication devices also need support in dealing with tragic events. Here is a great resource! [Click here](#) to read ways to help others cope.



Websites

Many public libraries have a variety of resources about helping children cope with grief. [Click here](#) to see some specific resources about the Newtown tragedy.

Please let me know if you're interested in one of my presentations and/or customized consulting and coaching.

Remember, what we anticipate, determines what we find!

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As a parent and an educator, I bring 35+ years of experience and enthusiasm to create positive change for students, families, and educators!

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