

Sunday July 21, 2013

Shooting victim invites grownups to grow up

By Jim Taylor

“The purpose of children is to help their parents grow up” -- I like to think that I invented that aphorism. More likely I heard it somewhere, and thereafter treated it as my own.

For most of us, having children is a startling wake-up call. We realize, perhaps for the first time, that others depend on us. They cannot look after themselves. We have to take responsibility, not just for our own actions – and pleasures – but for them.

It’s a dramatic change in attitude.

With that responsibility, fortunately, comes the joy of watching our children and grandchildren grow and mature, as the Bible puts it, “in wisdom and in stature, with God and with humans.”

I remember interviewing a minister’s wife who’d had what, in those days, was called a nervous breakdown. The couple’s three teenage children were, of course, asked to modify their behaviour to help their mother cope. Only after she had recovered did the teens confess that they thought the whole thing was a plot directed at them.

Tragically, some adults never outgrow their juvenile self-absorption. They treat their offspring as an inconvenience, to be beaten, abused, or left in an overheated car outside a pub.

Children can reflect back to us what we don’t want to see. I had to learn to mind my tongue when I heard certain words coming out of my children’s mouths.

Wisdom from youth

I won’t pretend that children are perfect. Children can be cruel, even vicious, to each other. But they don’t start off with adult prejudices.

Our two grandchildren are black, adopted from Ethiopia. They have experienced some of the age- and size-related bullying that always seems to go on among kids. But as far as I know, they have never experienced discrimination because of their skin or gender.

They are much luckier than, say, Trayvon Martin.

Or Malala Jouosefzai.

Somehow, I missed watching her address to the United Nations General Assembly. She is, of course, the 15-year-old Pakistani girl shot in the head last year by a Taliban gunman, simply because she spoke out for female education. After intensive rehabilitation at London’s Queen Elizabeth Hospital, paid for by the Arab Emirates, she recovered.

Her message challenges us all.

“Even if there was a gun in my hand and he was standing in front of me, I would not shoot him,” she said.

Not to seek revenge is itself an enormous step. To deliberately reject the authority of the gun makes her an enemy of the National Rifle Association as well as the Taliban.

Had the shooter succeeded in killing her, her voice would have been silenced. But by making her a world figure, he elevated her from an advocate for education in Pakistan to a spokesperson for the whole world.

A prophetic voice

“Here I stand,” she said, possibly echoing Martin Luther, “one girl, among many. I speak not for myself, but so those without a voice can be heard.

“We realize the importance of light when we see darkness. We realize the importance of our voice when we are silenced. In the same way, we realized the importance of pens and books when we saw the guns.”

Her words speak to all extremists: “The extremists are afraid of books and pens. The power of education frightens them. They are afraid of women. This is why they killed 14 innocent students in the recent attack in Quetta. And that is why they kill female teachers. That is why they are blasting schools every day because they were and they are afraid of change and equality that we will bring to our society.

“They think that God is a tiny, little conservative being who would point guns at people's heads just for going to school.”

She concluded, “I am here to speak for the right of education for every child. I want education for the sons and daughters of the Taliban and all the terrorists and extremists.

“Today I am focusing on women's rights and girls' education because they are suffering the most. There was a time when women activists asked men to stand up for their rights. But this time we will do it by ourselves. I am not telling men to step away from speaking for women's rights, but I am focusing on women to be independent and fight for themselves.

“We call upon all communities to be tolerant, to reject prejudice based on caste, creed, sect, colour, religion, or agenda to ensure freedom and equality for women so they can flourish. We cannot all succeed when half of us are held back.

“Let us wage a glorious struggle against illiteracy, poverty, and terrorism; let us pick up our books and our pens, they are the most powerful weapons. One child, one teacher, one book, and one pen can change the world.”

Malala couldn't make her message much clearer – c'mon, grownups, grow up!

Copyright © 2013 by Jim Taylor. Non-profit use in congregations and study groups encouraged; links from other blogs welcomed; all other rights reserved.

Please encourage your friends to subscribe to these columns too.

To send comments, to subscribe, or to unsubscribe, write jimt@quixotic.ca

YOUR TURN

There are a few of you out there, who, like me, feels your spirit is lifted by the sight of a train in a way that no tractor-trailer truck ensemble ever will.

Isabel Gibson: I regret the apparent passing of rail. I have been told that long-distance trucking is more heavily subsidized by tax dollars than is rail.

“Media reports (and, yes, the remarks by the remarkably un-media-savvy CEO) have been a bit disheartening in their knee-jerk 'find the perp' mentality. Accident analysis experts tell us that disasters are never the result of just one failure, yet the singular blame game is still entrenched in our thinking.

“Maybe we could all take a deep breath and do first what comes to hand: looking after the survivors. In the fullness of time, the investigation -- conducted by people competent to do it -- will determine the causes. From that, other people will take appropriate action. That system actually works, as shown by the steady decline in rail accidents over the last 10 years.

“As for the non-stop, wall-to-wall coverage of this appalling disaster, I am left thinking that Kate can't have that baby soon enough...”

Nancy Kerr took a tough line: “Lac Megantic is a tragedy which should never have happened. I think our federal government should stringently enforce a law which makes oil companies legally responsible for building and maintaining oil tank cars, pipelines, and tankers. Oil producers should be legally responsible financially for damages their property causes, be it spills on land, sea, or rails. I think they should pay for the clean water used in extraction and also pay for safe disposal of the toxic waste they make out of water. Then users pay the real cost of oil and public water, land and air are preserved for all citizens.”

Art Gans admitted, "I have been a railroad nut ever since I was about ten when I was a 'gofer' on the Northwestern Pacific RR [subsidiary of Southern Pacific] in California. My pay was the occasional ride in the cab of a steam locomotive, pulling the whistle at appropriate times and learning about one of the most beautiful and powerful inventions of humans, the steam locomotive.

"I didn't know about the Kelowna Pacific going belly up. That will certainly harm a lot of businesses in the Valley. Hopefully, someone will come along to bring it back into service. Otherwise the already bad traffic on Hwy 97 will increase by orders of magnitude and pollution will as well.

"I don't know if you ever read Frank Norris' 'The Octopus'. It is a barely disguised history of one of the most damaging monopolies in US history, the Southern Pacific Railroad, and its effect on California government, laws, and life. We complain about oil companies and how they work. SP and Standard Oil [owned by Rockefeller, Sr.] gave monopolies the lessons that have harmed us all."

Ian Pooley sent me a published research article he had written about the Okanagan Valley's rail lines (which, fortunately, didn't contradict my lesser research). He wrote, "Your observations about how Canadian towns have grown around the railway lines rings a bell. I lived in Trois Rivieres back in the '70s, and I can remember how the CPR line, including the yard, roundhouse, and station were located right in the middle of town.

"Your comments on Okanagan railway history were pertinent: in the North Okanagan, Vernon grew up around the CPR, and Armstrong is a good example of what happens when nothing is done to remove the railway! The CNR line, although now as you noted in decline, was the prime route for trains hauling tens of thousands of cars of fruit out of the Valley over a fifty year span, and was the Okanagan's main railway corridor to the Canadian Prairies from 1925 on, eclipsing the Kettle Valley in importance by the early 1930s. The CNR ran an overnight sleeping car service out of Kelowna to both Vancouver and Edmonton."

TECHNICAL STUFF

This column comes to you using the electronic facilities of Woodlakebooks.com.

If you want to comment on something, send a message directly to me, at jimt@quixotic.ca.

To subscribe or unsubscribe, send me an e-mail message at the address above. Or you can subscribe electronically by sending a blank e-mail (no message) to sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca. Similarly, you can un-subscribe at sharpedges-unsubscribe@quixotic.ca.

You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

I write a second column each Wednesday, called Soft Edges, which deals somewhat more gently with issues of life and faith. To sign up for Soft Edges, write to me directly, at the address above, or send a note to softedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca

PROMOTION STUFF...

If you know someone else who might like to receive this column regularly via e-mail, send a request to jimt@quixotic.ca. Or, if you wish, forward them a copy of this column. But please put your name on it, so they don't think I'm sending out spam.

For other sources worth pursuing, try

- Ralph Milton's HymnSight webpage, <http://www.hymnsight.ca>, with a vast gallery of photos you can use to enhance the appearance of the visual images you project for liturgical use (prayers, responses, hymn verses, etc.)
- David Keating's "SeemslikeGod" page, www.seemslikegod.org;
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap" -- reynoldsrap@shaw.ca
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, www.traditionaliconoclast.com
- Wayne Irwin's "Churchweb Canada," an inexpensive service for any congregation wanting to develop a web presence, with free consultation. <http://www.churchwebcanada.ca>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write alvawood@gmail.com to get onto her mailing list.
