

People Are Not for Shooting

This is Lieutenant Roger McCort of The Salvation Army in Eureka for today's Community Comment.

I often make light of very serious subjects because laughter helps hold the tears away. Kurt Vonnegut once said that "Laughter and tears are both responses to frustration and exhaustion," and it is particularly in those moments when my tendency towards sarcasm and to offer comments which may be in poor taste tends to rise to the top. I caught myself just a few days ago beginning to make a comment about buying a shorter flagpole, since the recent flood of violent tragedies around our country and the world have kept the flag at half-mast for several weeks. Is that even funny? Absolutely not, but for a moment it felt like it might be a comment to lift a mood, to deflect the pain of reflecting on the grief so many people are going through which I can do little or nothing to soothe.

In Douglas Adams' original radio play of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, just as the lead characters are about to be dumped out an airlock to presumably die in the vacuum of space, one of them says that it is at times like this he really wished he'd listened to what his mother told him when he was younger. "What was that?" asked his companion. "I don't know," he replied, "I never listened!"

My mother may not believe it, but I listened to many of the things she told me. One of those things is a simple phrase which I hear echoing in my head every time there is death because someone felt that the only way to get their point across was to fire a weapon at another. It may sound flippant to some, but I assure you that this advice was always delivered with utmost seriousness as my mom tried to instill a sense of the sacredness of human life into her children. She would fix us with a steady gaze until we met her eyes and she would very sternly say to us: "People are not for shooting."

It wasn't just news stories that we would hear which would draw this sage advice from her. The cap guns, laser tag, and rubber bands we played with could all expect to get the reminder, just in case we were practicing skills that we might try to take with us into the real world.

When I was young, video games were rarely more violent than Pac Man devouring the ghosts which haunted his game boards, but any game in which human life was shown being threatened was denied to us with the same line. "People are not for shooting." I can only imagine that Mom wouldn't approve of the Call of Duty series or any of its kin, all readily available to children in our society, most of whom have never been told or have even heard it implied that "people are not for shooting."

I don't bring this up to be flip or to find any humor in the humorless series of deaths which have paraded through our community consciousness over the last month. I bring it up because I believe it to be true and I can't help but wonder if getting the word out could help reduce or prevent further incidents of violence. Because maybe if you aren't told, you don't know. So let me say it to you all right now and ask you to pass it on to everyone you can.

People are not for shooting. People are not for shooting and people are not for running down with trucks and people are not for blowing up and people are not for hurting. Just don't do it. Find another way to get your message across, your voice heard, or the justice you feel has passed you by. Because people are not for shooting, so knock it off.

Grace and peace to you today. This has been Lt. Roger McCort for KINS Community Comment.