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Tragedies of our own making

by **Gil Villagrán, MSW**

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As daily news reports bring wave after wave of tragedies, both local such as gang members shooting each other, and far off, such as casualties of wars in the Middle East, the fact is that most tragedies are human made. Yes, there are natural disasters with tragic consequences to people, including earthquakes, volcanoes, hurricanes and floods. Even these so-called “acts of god” by insurance companies seeking to reduce their liabilities, can be mitigated by smart choices of where and how to build our cities, and preparation and early-warning systems to evacuate those at-risk.

But it is the totally human-caused tragedies that call for grave reflection upon how we live our lives, individually and collectively. Reflecting on the shooting at Virginia Tech University by a 23-year old student: it appears that almost everyone who knew him, suspected that he was seriously mentally ill, as did his family, teachers, roommates and fellow students. While some did offer friendship or even psychological assistance, no one did what was needed to effectively prevent the tragedy he very purposely committed by killing 32 and wounding many others. We must not overlook the reality that he himself did not accept the services offered and so desperately needed.

We must wonder, how many other Cho Seung-Huis are in our communities? And we know that there are almost as many firearms in America as there are people, and for as low as \$20--the price of a large pizza and a six-pack of beer, anyone can purchase a gun, legally or illegally. In Vallejo last weekend, a four-year-old reportedly shot his father to death with dad’s handy dandy handgun. Should we blame the parents, the child, the firearm industry?

There are countless shooting of adolescents who kill each other over rival gang affiliations, often based upon immigrant status, neighborhood residence, red or blue bandanas, skin color, or other quite irrelevant differences. Every dead teen is a grave tragedy, as are the survivors who end up in prisons for years, living wasted lives at a cost of \$40,000 per year. America has more than one million such inmates.

We may mourn the 400,000 totally preventable annual deaths due to tobacco, our nation's number one legal deadly drug, manufactured by an industry bursting with profit. Alcohol, also legal and insidiously industry promoted, is not far behind with 100,000 annual deaths, and countless more alcohol-related tragedies due to auto accidents and lives ruined by alcohol addiction. These are all tragedies of our own making, which kill, maim or critically damage our own and other's lives.

A recent count of American annual deaths caused by firearms, gangs, domestic violence, child abuse and drugs rate higher than all the victims of all wars fought since the Revolutionary War to the present, also self-inflicted war of choice in Iraq. In other words,

we are a nation killing ourselves by tragedies of our own making.

What can you do to avert such tragedy in your family? Destroy (not sell) the firearms you have, seek counseling to resolve anger and violence in your family, cure your substance abuse addictions, and live a healthy life to the fullest with your family and friends, in a healthy community.

Many of my editorials, essays, news articles are posted at www.indybay.org
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