

Our City

It is a miserable day. I can't distinguish the tears on my suit from the freezing sleet. I am not alone; much of our community is with me. All but two are in the same state. It was tragic and pointless all at the same time, yet our lives are forever changed, there will be no going back. The would of, should of, could of's will serve forever as a reminder that life is precious regardless of age but to me it seems more so in youth. Sadder still I saw it coming. Not nearly so soon and surely not here, but nonetheless I saw it coming. How could we all have missed it? Am I the only one thinking this as the priest presides over the funeral. I hope not! A life time of potential and promise is about to be laid to rest in the form of a fourteen year old boy, but there will be little rest for the souls left behind in the freezing rain - only torment and anguish - hell. And for what?

It started out innocent enough I suppose; hell I don't know. It sure looked real to me as the Facebook page was forwarded to me by the Police Chief. Not being a fan of social media it is difficult for me to determine someone's real intent after the fact from a picture; it sure as hell looked real and sure enough was deadly. But for the boy laying in a rain-soaked coffin and the officer on the far side nothing could have been truer or more deadly. Kids being kids some said. Some even condoned it as part of growing up. But one of us won't be growing up; that possibility is being buried. Yet, here we stand ready to blame each other for something that was totally preventable. Being a parent and teacher I know where my sentiments lie. Being a mayor even reinforces the sentiment, but others don't agree. They seem intent on blaming the police officer who arrived at the school and scene first. The police officer who will spend the rest of his life in a living hell with no reprieve from the anguish and torment, yet there he stands with tears in his eyes, sleet in his face and the blood of a fourteen year old boy forever on his hands. I can only imagine the state of his mind, and my heart breaks for him just as it does for the parents and family standing on the other side of the coffin forever in hell and so pointlessly so. At this time, blame is equally as pointless as the death mourned. The pages won't turn back, the story can't be retold and a happy ending written in. We are past that for the boy being buried and the police officer with blood on his hands. Why?

It was just two and half weeks ago that I received the email from the Chief. It showed what I thought was a Smith and Wesson .357 magnum in someone's lap. Accompanying the weapon were the words of some song from a genre of music I don't listen to. Words about brothers in death and going down in a blaze. Yes, it all seemed real enough to me. The officer with tears in his eyes and blood on his hands believed it was real too as he arrived on the scene seeing a bandana-clad youth brandishing a gun at his teacher and classmates. Seeing the gun after the fact did little to deter my sense of reality. If the Chief hadn't taken it apart I would have never known it was a compressed CO₂ pellet gun. The warning stamped on the side was real enough too, the short version, "may cause serious injury or death." True statement. Tragic but nonetheless true. And for what? How did we let it happen? It is certainly a 'we' question. A 'we' question as in, "We the people...of American Falls and Power County."

In the past two months two similar life-like guns have been brought to our schools by young boys. One was even fired at a vehicle, causing damage. Two weeks ago the high school received a bomb threat, one that was taken seriously by all responsible entities. When asked by citizens what is going on in our schools and town that these incidents almost seem commonplace troubles me and shames me deeply. I won't speak for them but I have to believe it does the same to our principals, Superintendent, Sheriff and Police Chief, along with our City

and County attorneys. Yet, when parents are confronted, a blind eye is turned on the deadly reality that may indeed play out before us.

In a meeting last Tuesday, our high school Principal, Superintendent, Sheriff, Police Chief and respective attorneys met to discuss and solve the matter of these and related incidents. The solution for our part will be to revise existing County and possibly City ordinances to further define what constitutes prohibited dangerous and deadly items on our school campuses. Further, we will begin a public awareness campaign describing and demonstrating the frightening reality of what once thought to be “toys” have come to be. To the student choosing to brandish a life-like weapon on school grounds it may become all too deadly. It will be our choice. Be thoughtfully engaged in the process when it begins. As a citizen, it is your duty and responsibility.

As the week played out after Tuesday’s meeting, the images of what might be remained firmly implanted in my mind. It happens in other places; not here in American Falls. “We are better than that,” I thought to myself all week. And then I ask myself, “Are we?” Time will be the judge.

At Wednesday’s Council meeting new City Park shelter reservation fees were discussed. I suspect that you will see reservation fees raise from \$30 to \$40 or \$50 and refundable cleaning deposits raised to \$80. Too often city employees spend multiple hours cleaning up after folks who choose to leave our facilities in a mess. It happens more than you might think; so instead of maintaining services and the appearances of our grounds, city employees spend their time and your money picking up after the less thoughtful among us. The increase in prices is hoped to be a deterrent for those prone to leaving a mess and offset your tax monies with fees paid by the users. After all you shouldn’t have to pay for someone else’s lack of social conscience.

On a brighter note, the Chamber of Commerce Christmas Festival was approved to occupy Idaho Street from Wells Fargo up to Tyhee Street. The festivities are to begin at 2:00 o’clock on the afternoon of December 5th concluding at 6:30 prior to the Christmas Concert beginning at 7:00 at St John’s Lutheran Church. The Chamber set the bar very high last year with a wonderful event and I am anxiously awaiting this year’s festival.

Harm’s Memorial Hospital will be sponsoring their Annual Turkey Trot on Thanksgiving morning from 8:00 to 10:00. The route for the event will follow the same one from last April for their Spring Fun Run. I hope to see you there; a short walk before the feast will do us all good.

As it is Friday, my mind still lingers on the images from the Facebook pages sent to me. And, I look forward to next week’s observance of Veteran’s Day on Wednesday, November 11. I wonder if so many fought and died so that a police officer could stand with blood on his hands and hell before him as he sees buried a boy that lacked responsible guidance and a society that willingly let it happen. That can’t be us! Can it? Where did we go so terribly wrong? Or have we? Is there still time to rewrite the tragedy? That will indeed be up to each of us and the role we choose to play in it. American Falls, the best place to live?

Until next week...