

Violence again arrives where it's least expected

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

If initial police reports are correct, 29-year-old John Lee of Moscow, a man with no known prior criminal record, went on a shooting rampage Saturday afternoon.

How do you explain the inexplicable?

Three people are dead: Terri Grzebielski, 61 of Moscow, Lee's adoptive mother and a physician's assistant; David Trail, 76, of Moscow, a financial adviser; and Belinda Niebuhr, 47, who managed the Moscow Arby's restaurant where she was shot and killed.

A fourth man, Michael Chin, 39, has been hospitalized for his wounds.

Presumably as the charges against Lee proceed through the criminal courts, his relationships with the victims will become defined.

Police and prosecutors will outline their theory of the case - possibly producing a motive and some understanding of how he obtained access to guns.

Shrouded in mystery is why what was once so unthinkable in this small, relatively isolated college town just a few years ago has become all too common.

Eight years ago, Moscow woke up to discover Jason Kenneth Hamilton had gunned down his wife, Crystal Hamilton. Then he took up a position at the First Presbyterian Church and fired at the Latah County Sheriff's Office across the street, killing church sexton Paul Bauer and Moscow Police Officer Lee Newbill, and then wounding three others before turning the gun on himself.

Four years ago, former University of Idaho assistant Professor Ernesto Bustamante shot to death his former lover, 22-year-old graduate student Katy Benoit, and then killed himself in a hotel room while police waited outside.

Then as now, people struggle to make sense of it all:

Is this a byproduct of our media fascination with violence?

Was there a history of mental illness?

Are there just too many guns in too many hands?

Is there more of this kind of violence taking place or has a 24/7 news cycle heightened our awareness?

How well did the people tasked with safeguarding public security perform their jobs?

However pertinent, each question seeks a rational response from a maddening situation. Each has the sense of futility. Time will pass. These issues will be ignored and then forgotten until the next horror comes along.

All you're really left with is the same profound sense of vulnerability: The line when someone's empathy ends and his mindless rage takes over is impossible to predict.

Anyone can be a victim. Society will never find a foolproof way to protect citizens in a free society against violence.

Life is as fragile as it is precious.

Civilization's veneer is indeed paper thin.

Sad, isn't it? Moments like these remind us we are all brothers and sisters on this Earth, bound together if nothing else by the knowledge that our time here is limited and unpredictable. - M.T.