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Front Porch: Tears of grief, for the victims and for our lack of humanity

Cindy Hval/SR Front Porch

It's not unheard of for me to write a column through tear-swollen eyes. After all, a personal column is, well, personal.

In this space, I've written about the sudden death of my beloved father-in-law, the near-death of my youngest son, the gut-wrenching ache of a child moving many states away, and the horrific murders of school children and teachers in Newtown, Connecticut.

I am a woman, a writer, a mother, a daughter, and a wife, and I view the world from those interchangeable lenses.

On Sunday morning, all of those lenses were clouded with tears as I woke to the news of the massacre in Orlando, Florida.

Here's what we know. At approximately 2 a.m. Sunday, Omar Mateen, 29, opened fire at the Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando. Mateen called 911 during the attack, pledging his allegiance to the Islamic State.

As of this writing, 49 victims are dead, 53 injured – the deadliest mass public shooting in modern U.S. history.

In the hours following the tragedy, I posted this statement on Facebook: If you're tempted to politicize the Orlando massacre, don't. Just don't. Finger pointing and blame will come soon enough. Can't we for once just be united in grief and mourn with the families of those slaughtered?

My hope was that at least for a few hours, we could lay down our politically divisive views on gun control, religion and homosexuality and simply be human beings acknowledging the horrible loss of life. Perhaps grieve in unity for just a bit with the families of the bereaved.

Silly me. I forgot national tragedy has now become political opportunity, with proponents of gun control advocating their views and Second Amendment activists and proponents of open-carry opining that if just a few more people in the nightclub had been carrying, wholesale slaughter would have been averted.

Is this what we've become then? We can no longer mourn with those who mourn? Every despicable act of wanton violence becomes another notch on a score card of why we are right and the opposing view is wrong? We cannot carve aside a single day or even an hour to grieve as a nation, as a people, as parents, for lives cut down through senseless violence?

And that, even more than the loss of innocent lives, is what triggered my tears. That's why through a church service and a graduation party, I could scarcely stop weeping. With every glimpse of social media rhetoric, I saw the lack of human decency – of human feeling.

Of course, finger-pointing, political intervention and discussions of causes and solutions has its place. Of course, there is a time for our nation to draw lines, to cast lots, to vote, but are the hours after the worst mass shooting in our nation's history that time?

Can we really not spare a few hours to pray, to comfort, to hold bereaved families in our thoughts?

Instead, I fear capitalizing on national tragedy to further political agenda has now replaced decency and mourning.

Reports say one of the most difficult things first responders dealt with in the hours following the carnage was the incessant ringing of cellphones on the bodies of the slain. As investigators made their way through the crime scene, phone after phone trilled – each ring representing a worried spouse, partner, friend, parent – hoping against hope that their loved one would answer. And for every unanswered call, dozens of hearts broke.

And my heart broke with them.

Shouldn't yours?

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