

CRIBBS NOTES

The inscription on the grave of baseball great Casey Stangle reads, "There comes a time in every man's life, and I've had a few." Stangle's words captured an unusual twist on a common phrase, but he offers an eloquent refrain about his various adventures both on and off the field. He lived a complete life that left an indelible image in the minds of those who watched, heard, or experienced him as one of baseball's premiere managers. He embodied the game and created a mythical persona.

Events take place in all of our lives. This past week's horrific shooting spree on the campus of Virginia Tech University brought home the extreme harm violence causes. Often, we feel removed from such tragedies, but when it happens in the tranquil environment of an academy, it becomes surreal and knocks us off balance. The most incredible reaction is also the most predictable: "How could that have happened?" "Can it happen here?"

It is unbelievable to realize there is a sweeping sense of surprise that an individual would act out so brutally with such finality when we share a near callous attitude toward the proliferation of weapons in private hands. In fact, the sacred status of guns in American society provides a protective shield from removing small arms and assault weapons out of our homes, cars, and personal possession. To even suggest the eradication of handguns borders on treachery. As a nation, we hold to a religious-like creed that guarantees our right to bear arms. There is the mantra, "Guns don't kill people. People kill people."

Rooted in the rampage that rocked Virginia Tech's campus was the failure to intervene in the life of a troubled youth. That, too, is not unusual. All around us are people, young and old, who live desperately neglected. They are ignored and left alone. No matter how many signals they give in their cries for "Help!" too many times we do not respond. Instead, we wait until it is too late.

Among the students who knew 23 year old Cho Seung-Hui, the man identified as the shooter, several said once they knew who did it, they were not surprised. Others presented his writings, including a play that projected a deeply disturbed person living among them. Yet, he did not attract the attention he needed to prevent the carnage. We know Cho Seung-Hui is not alone. Others are crying out right now.

"There comes a time in every person's life," as Casey Stangle reminded us. This is a moment that requires serious consideration about how we treat each other. We can ill-afford to not care about people who may be quiet, different, abandoned, or left alone. We must love everyone so much that we make ourselves available to be with them and share our time and resources. Unfortunately, the long season of human neglect has resulted in an almost incalculable number of people with broken spirits and heart aches. But, even with this overwhelming challenge, we must call upon the instruction, "The labor is great but the laborers are few," and forge on with a commitment to touch as many lives as possible.

We have been given another opportunity to pay close attention to what is happening around us. The map is dotted with sacred sites where suffering saturates every pore of wretched human beings. Perhaps, now is the time for us to determine how we will combine our resources and efforts to be the positive presence that makes the difference between life and death. It is not up to just one person to act. This special period in human history requires a collective, compassionate response. There comes a time in every person's life and this moment is one of them. What will we do with it?