

BROCK'S BANTER: Not the end of the rainbow

By Brock Weir

There are times when something happens in the world that makes words pour forth like a spring. Other times, however, an event comes along that dries that spring up and the words just won't come; instances where the feeling of there being nothing left unsaid becomes strange bedfellows with an equal sense there are just so many things left to say without having the wherewithal to put it into words.

I suspect many of you had that same feeling waking up on Sunday morning to the horrifying news of the hate crime and terrorist attack carried out in Orlando, Florida at the city's Pulse nightclub.

There was so much to be said, but how can you turn something so horrifying, an event that ultimately turned out to be the deadliest mass shooting in United States history, into a catchy soundbite, a Facebook post, or a 140-character Tweet?

Impossible.

Flipping on the TV that morning, however, I was surprised by the feeling of absolute numbness I experienced; a strange mixture of horror tempered with unusual resignation. After all, this is the United States of America and, tragically, mass shootings ? although never on this scale, and rarely against a particular demographic, such as this ? are a regular occurrence.

Gun control, or lack thereof, has made us all too desensitized to reports of these senseless killings.

For me, it took a couple of hours for the gravity of the situation to really sink in.

Shortly after the news broke, I attended the now-annual outdoor service hosted jointly by Aurora United Church and Trinity Anglican Church under the beautiful canopy at Town Park and saw a community that is very much together and in tune with each other.

At one point at the service, I smiled to myself as I watched a woman eagerly cross the park and, with a big grin, throw her arms around one equally grinning man, two kids in tow, one of the heads of a two-dad family. As the true extent of this tragedy continued to unfold well beyond the tree canopy, there was a bright ray of sunshine to take in, symbolic of pride, acceptance and basic, simple humanity.

By the time the service concluded, it was time to catch Barack Obama address the world from the White House. Despite his continued advocacy for tighter gun control in his country, these situations continue and the address was given by a President who seemed remarkably deflated, likely due to the inaction and lack of political will of those clinging onto the lower, but influential, rungs of power ? and their guns.

?This is an especially heartbreaking day for all our friends ? our fellow Americans ? who are lesbian, gay bisexual or transgender,? said President Obama. ?The shooter targeted a nightclub where people came together to be with friends, to dance, to sing, and to live. The place where they attacked is more than a nightclub; it is a place of solidarity and empowerment where people have come together to raise awareness, to speak their minds, and to advocate for their civil rights.

?So, this is a sobering reminder that attacks on any American ? regardless of race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation ? is an attack on all of us and on the fundamental values of equality and dignity that define us as a country. And no act of hate or terror will ever change who we are or the values that make us Americans.

?Today marks the most deadly shooting in American history. The shooter was apparently armed with a handgun and a powerful assault rifle. This massacre is, therefore, a further reminder of how easy it is for someone to get their hands on a weapon that lets them shoot people in a school, or in a house of worship, or a movie theatre, or in a nightclub. And we have to decide if that is the kind of country we want to be. And to actively do nothing is a decision as well.?

Sadly, that is a decision our American neighbours seem all too willing to make.

Our neighbours seem more concerned about who might be standing next to them at the urinal or passing toilet paper to them from underneath the wall of a bathroom stall when they come up short, with Christian fundamentalists blowing up bathrooms in department stores all in the name of ?protecting their children.?

There is nothing better to make bathrooms safer for children than blowing them up, apparently. Yet, for these religious fundamentalists, the LGBTQ community is the problem.

While the inexplicable presidential candidate took the opportunity to bask in the kudos he was receiving from his small-minded followers on social media because, in their view, the perpetrator of this crime justified their own hatred and Islamophobia, those holding onto the keys of the corridors of power took the time to send ?their prayers? to the families of all victims.

Some even took the time to exercise the tried and tested one-two punch of sending prayers all the while clinging to Charlton

Heston's cold, dead mantra of 'guns don't kill people, people kill people.'

If anything, this senseless tragedy has vaulted the issue of mass shootings and gun control back into the public discourse and right into the middle of a heated Presidential campaign presenting two diametrically opposing visions of what they want the country to be. At the moment, there are two clear diametrically opposed visions of America being presented to voters by their two candidates. In my view, one choice is clear while the other is too backward to think about. But, will Sunday's mass shooting galvanize those with ballots ' and those depending on those ballots ' to take action?

Given that school shootings haven't served as that call to action, I don't suspect a homophobic hate crime will be enough to propel them to see the light. Unfortunately, I fear they will stay in their comfort zones, banking on the power of prayer ' and the backing of the NRA ' to make everything right in the world.

Nevertheless, I have hope in the up-and-coming generation. Through this position, I have had many opportunities to report on the amazing work being done by local elementary and high school students, and their teachers, dedicated to building inclusive societies. Unlike my days in high school, which mercifully came to a close 13 years ago, it seems being a member of the LGBTQ community carries far less stigma than it once did and is, more often than not, something that is rightfully celebrated.

They step up to the plate to be the change they want to be in the world, and that too is a bright light on the horizon.

But it is up to every one of us to pick up that light and shine it proud, and there are plenty of opportunities to do so this weekend from the York Region Pride Parade on Sunday that will take place on the Richmond Hill stretch of Yonge Street, to their family-friendly Pride in the Park.

If you haven't yet taken part in such festivities, make this the year to take part. Show the community that you're with her, that you're with him, and you're with them because love always wins.