

Questions in the Carnage

By Dennis Knight

For the Windsor Gardens community, the Century 16 in Aurora is our neighborhood movie theater. It's the one closest to us, and with its multitude of features showing every day, it's where we often go. I doubt there were any of us there for the premiere of *The Dark Knight Rises*, but we likely have connections to some who were. It was a full house, an event for the young who have the energy for a midnight movie and a fascination for the campy but ever more violent Batman franchise. Some even wore costumes.

Shortly after midnight on Friday, July 20th, 2012, a man in the theater calmly left his seat, passed through the emergency exit near the screen, propped the door open, and returned moments later, armored from head to foot, wearing a gas mask. Then, in a matter of only minutes, as time stood still, he methodically took twelve young lives, injured fifty-eight others, and fractured the peace of the world.

Journalists over the last few days have told and retold us *who*, *what*, *when* and *where*, leaving us to ponder the final criterion, *why*? Was there a single triggering event in the life of the shooter that wrenched him away from years of work and study toward a promising career as a life-giving neuroscientist?

Did he have a fascination with violent video games and movies that left his psyche desensitized to death, finding glamour in bloody carnage? Was it a warped sense of irony that brought him to dramatically seize the stage to play the diabolical antihero of the Batman series, the Joker, just as gunfire erupted on the screen? Had he quietly waited for that cue to begin his reign of terror?

The question of *why* the massacre happened will be answered, we hope, through the painstaking process of a public trial. In that regard, we are fortunate, because the coward, unlike so many depraved killers before him, spared his own life at the end of his siege.

But another *why* needs to be answered. The killer purchased all of his guns and ammunition quite legally, leaving us to wonder *why* it should be legal for any civilian who is not part of the law enforcement community to have access to an assault weapon, or to the magazines that give those weapons their terrible rapid firepower.

Assault weapons, banned until 2004, became legal again simply because profiteering gun makers hold our democratic society, ironically, at gunpoint. Congress kowtows to the industry and its lobbying puppet, the National Rifle Association, and woe to any presidential candidate who makes even oblique reference to assault weapons.

The NRA has campaigned for decades under a half truth, "Guns don't kill people; people kill people." The full truth, and you and I know it, is that people with guns kill people. Tragic events move us to tears, reflection, prayer and words, but they haven't carried us to action. Maybe this time.