

Teens are casualties of war on the home

OF COURSE, AS soon as something like this happens, they all shriek like hyenas, their words ending up in newspapers and on TV and meaning absolutely nothing.

I'm talking about the politicians who lunge for the microphones seemingly before someone like 15-year-old Charles Andy Williams has even finished shooting up a California high school, killing two, wounding 13.

The response is pathetically predictable. Democrats howl for more gun laws. Republicans urge that existing laws be enforced. Isolated academics, narrow-minded conservatives and know-it-all liberals are worse because their beliefs are soaked in arrogance. They continue to blame TV, movies, Eminem's songs, rampant permissiveness or the climate of violence choking our society.

I have always arrived at the intersection of these debates unarmed with statistics. I have only my eyesight, along with my observations from years of taking notes while talking to victims or simply staring at the bodies of dead young people, a tag on their toe, as they lay in a city morgue, any future just as dead as their sad past.

It is not simply the gun. It is not only the music, cheap videos, Saturday morning cartoons, playground bullies, commercialism, the absence of money or the lack of hope.

All this surely factors into the equation, but the big-ticket item — the common clue in almost every mad act committed by these kids — is what does, or does not, happen in the home.

The apology being made for young Williams is that he is slight of build, lonely and targeted by bullies. When do you suppose kids began bullying one another? A year before, or after, Christ was born?

Naturally, whenever it's one of these suburban kids — white and thin and innocent-appearing — many gasp in shock. This is not some black kid from the Bronx with a gun. That we can understand. But San Diego, Hanover, N.H., Williamsport, Pa.? My God, what's happening?

Here's what's happening: An absence of attention paid by parents toward their children. A lack of accountability that includes everything from homework to where and who they hang with Saturday afternoon. A country where peer pressure has disappeared, where the people upstairs and next door are strangers, mobili-

ty that breeds indifference and laws that make it possible for kids to acquire a handgun but make it impossible to say a prayer in school.

Only two died at Santana High. But because they were white and lived in a nice suburb, the story exploded coast to coast. Yet every single day, our cities are littered with the corpses of the young, some truly dead, many others among the walking dead. And then there are those stories, so common, so sad and so unknown to most.

In Syracuse last week, Christopher Ariola was charged with felony manslaughter after he allegedly beat his father to death with a baseball bat. He is 17.

According to a statement he made to Syracuse detectives, Ariola grabbed the bat and began to swing away after an argument over the volume of music being played on a radio. Then, after killing him, the boy wrapped his old man in a blanket, went bowling with a girlfriend, tried to commit suicide, failed and finally went to a pizza shop where he had once worked and told his former boss he had clouted the life out of his father.

"After the third hit, he doesn't say any more," the 17-year-old said in his statement to police. "There's blood everywhere ... I bent down and I could tell he wasn't breathing. I checked, but he wasn't. I started crying. I said no, no, why did this have to happen, Dad, I love you."

Wait, there's more. In Brooklyn, a 16-year-old throws her baby out the window into an alley where the infant is devoured by a dog. In Des Moines, Wash., a police officer is shot and killed after stopping four teenagers walking along a highway 5 miles south of the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. All four of the kids, ranging in age from 15 to 18, are suspects in the homicide.

And in North Augusta, S.C., the mother of the boy now famous for allegedly killing two in Southern California, divorced from his father for a decade, said she could not understand what had happened because he had seemed quite content the last time the two spoke, "earlier this year."

It is a whole lot more than just guns behind this madness. And it is the American family that has become the ultimate casualty.

No one should express surprise over the fact that the body count continues to grow.



*It's not
the guns,
movies or
music that's
destroying
kids*

**MIKE
BARNICLE**