

Why a remote Idaho school is arming teachers with guns By Lucy Schouten, Christian Science Monitor, October 22, 2015

Debates over how to stop school shootings continue on the national scene, but several schools in the West and South are taking matters into their own hands by arming teachers, despite the risks. Lighthouse Christian School, a private school in Twin Falls, Idaho, has responded to potential shooting threats by arming administrators and teaching them to use guns. "With people spread out throughout your facility, you have greater protection as well, responding to an incident," Kevin Newbry, the superintendent at Lighthouse Christian School, told KMVT. "With an intruder that has a gun or a rifle, statistics show the only thing that is going to stop an issue is another gun, unfortunately."

Elsewhere in the state, public schools are trying it. A small school district in Garden Valley, Idaho, decided to arm school employees last summer. The district did not have the money to hire a resource officer, and the police response time to the rural school was 30 to 45 minutes. "We just have to protect our kids and we didn't want to do it in a haphazard way," Marc Gee, Garden Valley School District superintendent, told KBOI News. "It's been positive – I have yet to have a community member come in and say, 'Why are you doing this?'" Six employees trained with local police. School board member Alan Ward told The Associated Press the district spent \$3,500 on the security plan for the school, which enrolls fewer than 300 students, and the community donated the rest.

After the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Newtown, Conn., several schools tried to arm teachers as a precaution against further shootings. Different schools in Colorado and Arizona armed on-campus volunteers in 2013, and a small district in Arkansas armed 20 school staff in 2013, The Christian Science Monitor reported. The move drew criticism for both ideological and financial reasons, and the state of Kansas scrapped a plan to arm its teachers after insurance companies balked. "We just think educators should be in the business of educating students, not carrying a weapon," Donna Morey, former president of the Arkansas Education Association, told The Christian Science Monitor at the time.

Teachers in Utah are free to arm themselves, and during the state's October break from school, the Utah Shooting Sports Council offered free concealed weapons classes to 20 teachers. The class aimed to expand teachers' options beyond the district's policy of locking the classroom door, turning off the lights, and hiding, KSL News reported. "A shooter who wants to end his life via suicide but take a whole bunch of other people with him, probably wants to pick a place to exact that evil plan without getting return fire," council chairman Clark Aposhian told KSL News. "We are hoping to show that Utah schools and universities are not a place to do that."

Some in the area criticized the idea, saying teachers have enough to learn without adding weapons training. "Teachers have so much other training to undergo," retired elementary educator Malinda Lund told KSL News. "They just aren't equipped to handle firearms."

This column is gluten-free, Roger Cohen, The New York Times, October 20, 2015

I was in Venice a few weeks ago and friends reported seeing a restaurant menu with the following important message emblazoned it: “We do NOT serve gluten-free food.” It was easy to imagine an exasperated Italian proprietor, driven to frenzy by repeated requests from Americans for gluten-free pasta, finally deciding to cut short such exchanges with this blunt pre-emptive blow.

Gluten is the main protein component of wheat, rye and barley. Wheat was first cultivated about 12,000 years ago and it’s safe to say gluten has never had as hard a time as in recent years. The hunter-gatherer turned cultivator would be appalled at what he has wrought. Free associate from the word “gluten” these days and you’ll probably come up with poison. This column, by the way, is gluten-free. Please feel at liberty to read on.

There has been a huge and mysterious rise in celiac disease, an autoimmune disorder that results in damage to the small intestine when gluten is ingested. Four times as many people suffer from celiac disease as 60 years ago, and roughly one in 100 people are now affected. Why is unclear. Perhaps it’s the way gluten products are prepared today, or even, some have suggested, the result of a bored immune system looking for new targets.

But of course the gluten-free trend is not just about multiplying celiac sufferers. People decide gluten must be bad for them because they see shelves full of gluten-free food at supermarkets. Forms of food intolerance, whether to wheat or dairy products, have reached near epidemic levels among the global middle class. Special dietary needs are all the rage. Allergies, real or imagined, multiply. One in five Britons now claim some form of intolerance, yet a 2010 Portsmouth University study found the claims were often unfounded. The narcissism of minor differences finds expression in the food-intolerance explosion: Having a special dietary requirement is one way to feel special in the prevailing “me” culture. But I don’t want to show the intolerance of the omnivore for faddish food particularism, however overblown it may be. There’s a lot that’s good in food fetishes.

People are more aware of what they eat and how they want to feel as a result of what they eat. They are more demanding, with instant access to the information they need to make shrewd dietary choices; and they are surely not wrong to blame processed food and greater pollution and stress for certain allergies.

The political, it often seems, has become personal. Where people wanted to change the world, now they want to change their bodies. Wellness is a political pursuit because it involves choices about food that will impact the planet. Eating local or eating organic or both are lifestyle statements that have become engaged political acts. The pursuit of wellness, increasingly tied to the pursuit of beauty and agelessness, stands at the heart of the current zeitgeist. I eat well therefore I am.

People, if they have a choice, are eating better. That’s good. But there is also a downside that has to do with self-indulgence, commercial manipulation, the rampant anxiety associated with “affluenza” and narcissistic fussiness.

A Powerful New Tool for 'Editing' the Human Genome by Alice Park, Time, Feb. 4, 2016

It would hardly be hyperbolic to say that inside a nondescript office in London on Feb. 1, a small group of scientists and patient advocates made a decision that could potentially change the future of humanity. Since 2012, scientists have been experimenting with CRISPR-Cas9, a powerful tool that works like an editor for DNA – allowing them to find and correct mutations that can lead to deadly diseases. Now, for the first time, a researcher has the green light to test this tool on viable human embryos. Kathy Niakan is expected to start trials in London at the Francis Crick Institute within the next several months.

Scientists have manipulated the genomes of many animal species, but no sanctioned studies on human embryos have been done using CRISPR. Last year, to the horror of some scientists and ethicists, Chinese researchers reported that they had experimented on human embryos, prompting calls for a temporary worldwide moratorium on the use of CRISPR on so-called germline cells – those from human embryos, eggs or sperm. That's because unlike other gene-editing techniques, which can be clunky to use, CRISPR is precise, efficient, affordable and, perhaps most concerning to some, easy to use. That's what makes the Feb. 1 decision, issued by the U.K.'s Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority so precedent-setting. It's also what makes it so controversial. Depending on whom you ask, CRISPR can be cast as a medical miracle with the potential to help cure diseases like sickle-cell anemia, Alzheimer's and even cancer – or a science-fiction nightmare waiting to happen.

For her part, Niakan is treading carefully. She ultimately hopes her research will shed light on what makes a healthy embryo, which could lead to information that could help prevent miscarriages and improve fertility. "We want to understand the biology of how to make a successful embryo," says Niakan. "Now we have a really efficient method that allows us to make very precise and specific alterations to the DNA sequence. That allows us to ask questions about the function of genes, and which are required for healthy development." Because the research is focused on the earliest stage of development, the embryos will be destroyed after seven days (which in itself is an aspect of this work that makes some people uncomfortable).

The fact that CRISPR allows scientists to permanently alter the human genome of embryos makes some scientists nervous. "I do not think we are ready to edit human embryos yet," says J. Craig Venter, who co-mapped the human genome. "We have little or no knowledge of how changing the genetic code will affect development. Only a small percentage of genes are well understood. For most, we have little or no clue as to their role."

Jennifer Doudna, a professor of chemistry and molecular and cell biology at the University of California, Berkeley, who played a key role in developing CRISPR, says she supports Niakan's study—but only because she isn't bringing the embryos to term. "I don't think it's appropriate or responsible to use CRISPR in embryos that would be implanted in people right now," she says, adding that there are too many unknowns about the long-term effects of manipulating human genes.

Don't let fear of concussions ruin sports for kids, by Neilank Jha, The Toronto Star, December 10, 2015

The movie *Concussion*, featuring Will Smith and Alec Baldwin, will open on Christmas Day. The movie focuses on the challenges of head injuries in football and the difficulties faced by doctors, researchers, and league officials in preserving the game while keeping the players safe. Make no mistake: the problem of head injury is not confined to football. Other sports like soccer, hockey, and basketball are grappling with this serious issue. In my practice as a neurosurgeon, I see the effects every day. But as we move to protect athletes from head injuries, we must make sure we don't go overboard and discourage our kids from taking part in competitive sports — even contact sports like football and hockey. Kids would find it easy to fill the void with even more video games and social media. Obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure would be the new norm.

Sports provide kids an opportunity to exercise their bodies and minds. Discipline, teamwork and character-building are all an essential part of sport. Sport provides dreams for our children, heals communities and unites people of all backgrounds. For too long, though, professional sports ignored or downplayed the problem of head injuries. Finally, that's changing. Social media lights up the moment fans suspect a concussion, and fans are holding the professional leagues accountable. As a result, the pro leagues have adopted stringent concussion protocols and have invested in research and development to promote player safety.

But what about kids playing at the grassroots level? They look up to their heroes and emulate the pros. That's why we must continue to make sure that the extra attention to head injuries now being paid at the pro level is carried out throughout sports. When the progress the pro leagues are making trickles down to children in our communities, we can change the culture of sport starting from a child's very first game and reduce exposure to these cumulative injuries from the very beginning.

Sports will survive the concussion epidemic. And rather than deny our children the opportunity to play, we should focus on education, prevention, diagnosis and treatment. Fortunately, there's great support among Ontario's leaders for taking action on this issue. On Thursday, the first concussion legislation in Canada for young athletes will come up for debate in the legislature. Rowan's Law is named for 17-year-old Rowan Stringer, an Ottawa teen who died after being knocked unconscious while playing rugby. The law is designed to promote education on sport-related concussions to coaches, athletes and parents.

Rowan's Law is a good first step to address issues surrounding concussion, but much remains to be done. The bill would not set aside any money to accomplish the goals it sets out. So we also need to develop legislation that would fund and support education and prevention throughout the province. It appears there is support among all parties to advance this initiative. If we can successfully do that, we can keep encouraging kids to play, and play hard. But we can do it while knowing that we've done everything possible to keep them safe. Let our kids play — but let's protect them.

How political correctness rules in America's student 'safe spaces' The Daily Telegraph, Nov 28, 2015

As the law professor prepared for her class on sexual assault, she opened her emails to find a strange request: could she give assurances that the content of the class would not be included in the end-of-year exam, her students asked? They were concerned there might be victims of sexual assault among their classmates. Anyone in that position could be traumatised at being confronted with such material in the exam hall. Across the United States, lecturers have received similar messages from students demanding that modules of academic study – ranging from legal topics to well-known works of literature – be scrubbed from exams, and sometimes from the syllabus altogether. Jeannie Suk, a professor at Harvard Law School cited an example where a student had asked a colleague “not to use the word 'violate' – as in 'does this conduct violate the law' – because the term might trigger distress”.

Today's generation of American students increasingly appears to yearn for a campus ruled by dogmatic political correctness, in which faculty members assume the role of parents more than purveyors of academic rigour. The lexicon of college has changed: students now speak about “micro-aggressions”, “trigger warnings” and “safe spaces”. The notion of the “safe space” first emerged to describe a place of refuge for people exposed to racial prejudice or sexism. But the phrase has changed meaning to the point where now it often implies protection from “exposure to ideas that make one uncomfortable”. At Brown University students set up a “safe space” that offered calming music, cookies, Play-Doh and a video of frolicking puppies to help students cope with a discussion on how colleges should handle sexual assault. A Harvard student described in the university newspaper attending a “safe space” complete with “massage circles” that was designed to help students have open conversations.

This hesitancy to engage in the dialogue of debate – and, in its most extreme form, the sense that hearing opposing opinions can cause damage to the psyche – has seeped from the campus to the classroom. About two years ago, Prof Suk said her Harvard students began reacting “noticeably differently” to lectures on sexual assault that make up part of her criminal law class. There were curious questions from the students: “Why did you choose to show this film’ or 'Why did you choose to assign this reading without giving us a warning of what they contained?’

The introduction of “trigger warnings” may have been designed to protect people who have suffered serious trauma, but critics fear they are now a means to prevent the free discussion in class that is an essential part of academic learning. In this new environment, lecturers in some English departments have started to warn of the potentially traumatic effects of reading material. Literary classics are now considered potentially “unsafe” for students to read. Reading lists at some universities are being adapted to come with warnings printed beside certain titles: *The Great Gatsby* by F Scott Fitzgerald (Trigger: suicide, domestic abuse and graphic violence) and *Mrs Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf (Trigger: suicidal tendencies). In some colleges, professors have been known to tell students that if a book makes them feel unsafe, they are allowed to skim it, or skip it altogether.