

COULD I HAVE DONE MORE?

During my life time I have had the privilege of meeting a variety of notable people. Some were famous, others notable, and a small number infamous. The most notorious was a teenager named Doug Turner from Glendive, Montana.

Doug earned a villainous status from Dawson County Attorney, Scott Herring. He described Doug as the most prolific murderer ever in the State of Montana. This 15-year-old boy became one of the most ill-famed characters to cross my path. Our first encounter came when I became the Director of Home on the Range, a childcare facility on the western North Dakota border. Doug was a resident at the facility when I arrived. His demeanor led you to believe he was a jovial kid, with a chubby face and a lopsided grin, which disguised his hidden nature.

As I was getting to know the residents I had initial conversations with each one of them in my office. Prior to the interviews I had read their social histories which were accompanied with legal documents for their residential placement. As I got to know Doug I began to ask him questions about his background. His personal history indicated that he had an early onset of drug and alcohol usage, which was extensive for his age of 15 years. During the conversation I asked him at what age did he know he was having trouble controlling the use of alcohol. His answer was edifying. Doug stated, "By the time I was twelve I knew that I was in trouble with alcohol, big time."

Doug's responses lead to other questions about his history with alcohol usage. He informed me that his mother managed a local bar. She worked long hours starting early in the day until late in the evening. These unsupervised days lead Doug to spending time alone and to choose his own activities. He stated when he was 10 years old he would take a six pack of beer out of the frig, go in the backyard and drink all of it. He continued this routine and realized he had a problem with alcohol abuse before he became a teenager. Other than this

obvious beginning of an addiction problem, along with a history of delinquencies, his stay at Home On the Range was unremarkable until an evening late in the fall.

My wife, Barb, and I, lived with our two children in the Director's residence which was a quarter of a mile from the ranch complex. On a late October evening I received a phone call from the Counselor in Charge of the residents in Eagle Hall. He told me a boy named Charles wanted to talk to me and it appeared to be important. I informed the counselor that I would come down to my office in a few minutes and to send Charles over to the admin building.

When Charles arrived, he got right to the point and stated that two residents were going to run away after lights out. He didn't know many facts but I gained the impression that he thought it was serious. I dismissed Charles and waited for an hour. I called the supervisor's office in Eagle Hall and requested that he escort Doug and his cohort to the conference room down the hall from my office.

When the boys arrived, we engaged in small talk for a few minutes. I then began to address their scheme to run away. They, of course, denied any intention of leaving in the middle of the night. As the conversation wore on, I got the feeling that there was more to the escape plan than was evident from the few details that we were able to put together. Doug had a smirk on his face and he appeared confident he was in control of the situation. He did not reveal in any manner that he was nervous about being apprehended in his attempt to engage in criminal behavior. He was cognizant that his actions could result in his dismissal from Home on the Range and be remanded to the court's jurisdiction.

As the conversation became a stalemate, I excused myself, left the conference room and called the Juvenile Supervising Officers for both boys. I requested authorization to place each boy in the custody of the County Sheriff's department. Each supervisor authorized my request and informed me they would send authorities to pick them up the next day.

The following morning the staff searched the boys clothing lockers and found in Doug's locker a sock filled with pool balls. It was evident that they

planned on attacking the night staff, incapacitating him by assaulting him with their makeshift weapon. At the time I felt great relief about my decision to request confinement for the boys until they could be returned to their jurisdictions.

Several weeks went by and I called the Supervising Juvenile Officer assigned to Doug. I wanted to know what the courts disposition was in his case. He informed me that Doug had been placed in a drug and alcohol treatment center in northeast Montana. After hanging up and giving the conversation some thought, I concluded this was the appropriate placement for Doug.

Time passed, and I stop thinking about Doug until bold headlines from a Montana newspaper appeared on November 20th, 1987. The morning newspaper screamed facts concerning multiple murders in the community of Glendive. The story was grim. The facts were later recorded during a postconviction hearing, denying relief from the sentencing of Doug to 350 years in prison. The investigation revealed the following sequence of events:

"Turner was drinking Southern Comfort whiskey, vodka, and beer at a party in Glendive, Montana. Turner was 16 years old and had just been released from an alcohol treatment program which he was committed to as a result of several juvenile offenses. After the party broke up, Turner was dropped off at home around midnight. He went into his house and retrieved a 30-30 caliber rifle. Turner went next door and killed James Brooks, Ora Brooks, and Sharon Brooks. Doug had never met his neighbors before."¹

"Around midnight, a neighbor heard someone yell, "God damn it, let me in." Another neighbor heard James Brooks saying, "Put the gun away." Shortly thereafter, five shots were fired. Ora Brooks was shot while running out of the house screaming. Sean Brooks and his friend Scott Miller (the boys were eight years old), were in the Brooks basement preparing to go to sleep when Turner entered the house. Upon hearing the gunshots, Sean and Scott ran upstairs. They saw Turner in the kitchen. They immediately got down on the floor and covered their heads. Turner's rifle misfired, so he beat them on the head with the butt

end of his rifle. When Turner left them to go downstairs, the boys ran from the home. Police arrived a few minutes later and arrested Turner without incident.”²

Doug was charged in court with three counts of deliberate homicide, two counts of felony assault, and one count of aggravated burglary. He was represented in court by Dawson County Public Defender, Jerry Cook. Turner plead guilty telling his attorney that he did not want to put the Brooks family and his family through hurt for a second time.

During the court process his attorney requested that Doug have a psychiatric examination at the State Hospital in Warm Springs, Montana. The report came back stating that Doug suffered from conduct disorder, solitary aggressive type, alcohol dependence, cannabis abuse, and psychoactive substance abuse. The Psychiatric team also concluded: “Mr. Turner does not suffer from a mental disease or defect that would interfere with his competence to stand trial. He does suffer from Conduct Disorder which is essentially an abnormality manifested by antisocial conduct.”³

“At the time of the alleged crime it is clear that Mr. Turner was under the effects of alcohol intoxication. As with anyone who consumes enough alcohol his impulse control and judgment are severely impaired. Due to the effects of the alcohol and only due to the effects of the alcohol he was not capable of acting with knowledge and purpose at the time of the criminal conduct charge. However, his state was not due to an idiosyncratic response to alcohol. Also, he had foreknowledge of the effects of alcohol and in spite of two inpatient courses for substance abuse he chose to consume the alcohol with a clear knowledge and purpose.”⁵

“The evaluation also documents that Turner was physically abused as a child, he did not have a good relationship with his adoptive father and had been sexually abused on one occasion.”⁶

The above information gives a partial explanation, Doug’s judgment and intellect were severely impaired. As we look for further explanations we search

for answers, Doug's future actions give us more insight into the mind of a anti-social killer.

At times, we as humans raise the vision of evil in a person's soul. In the modern-day world, we don't logically assign the label of evil to individuals. After we review the person's history, facts, and environment we begin to assign other motivations for their reprehensible acts. But there are times I have wondered, in my career of 30 years in corrections, are there people who are truly evil? I can think of no more than a small number of people who I would consider evil. When evaluating their evil behavior, I also think through all the other supplemental factors. I pose this question. "Is there evil present in the world or only evil actions?" The tragedy of Doug's story is he gives us ample opportunity to think of him as a person possessed by evil.

The viciousness of human beings becomes apparent with his next attack on a fellow human being. Doug and another inmate William Gollehon killed Gerald Pileggi while in prison in Deer Lodge, Montana. "Prosecutors said the pair had harassed Pileggi because he was a sex offender and then killed him because he had reported their taunting to officials."⁷

The details of this murder are more explicit in court documents *State v. Turner*. "Turner and Gollehon worked in the Prison kitchen and it was known that Turner did not like sex offenders who were working in the kitchen. A movement started to rid the kitchen of sex offenders and take back the kitchen from inmates who had been convicted of sex offences. Pileggi was a sex offender. Pileggi was attacked in the kitchen in the dish room and was beaten by Turner, Gollehon and inmate named Daniels. Pileggi refused to say who had beaten him but Turner, Gollehon and Daniels were dismissed from their job in the kitchen.

On September 2, 1990 Pileggi went to the exercise yard to walk around the track. As Pileggi was nearing the softball field he was accosted by Gollehon who had a bat in his hand. They began arguing and Gollehon hit Pileggi on the side of the face. Turner then came up with a bat and hit Pileggi in the head and on his way down he struck Pileggi again with the bat. Gollehon and Turner then hit him

each 5 or 6 times. Turner and Gollehon left the yard when two Correction Officers came across Pileggi lying on the ground with horrific injuries. He was transferred to a hospital but died in route. Turner's cell mate stated that he returned to his cell calm and acting normal." 8

At this point I want to make observations about prison culture. First, is questioning the authenticity of the "Inmate Code". There is a myth that the inmate code is sacrosanct. The premise of the code is that an inmate is never to rat on another inmate in a rule violation or committing a crime, in or out of prison. Also, there is a hierarchy of crimes. Sex offenders are on the bottom of the list and are looked down upon by all the other prisoners. I found the inmate code to be a thin veneer to cover behavior that would intimidate other prisoners from giving information which could relate to illegal behavior within the prison or offenses prior to their incarceration. Also, the ranking prisoners gave those who had committed grave offenses a sense of superiority over others. This provided a warped sense of prestige assigned to themselves.

The "Inmate Code" is a false concept. Numerous times inmates would give information about another inmate if they could gain some personal advantage. Why not? The inmate society is not made up of people who have based their life on honorable virtues or stellar codes of conduct but on one of preying on other people and their property. The only recognizable use of the inmate code is to control one inmate by another inmate by threatening to uphold retribution if they fear exposure of their illegal conduct. It is a code based on ignorance, fear, and brutal intimidation. Only Hollywood seems to place a value on the code.

The murder of Piliggei resulted in Turner and Gollehon receiving the death penalty. The horrific act committed by these two felons should have ended their murderous behavior but there was still another grisly chapter to be written.

While awaiting news of his appeal on the murders of the Brooks family Doug participated in a riot of rampage, destruction and death in the Maximum Security unit at Deer Lodge Prison on September 22, 1991.

Before I proceed with the facts relayed in the Washington Post. I want to pause for a moment and have all of us think about our purpose. Could I, should I, did I have enough strength, kindness, awareness to do more to derail Doug from the terrible course he chose in his life. I cannot answer this question, but it still haunts my thoughts as I think of the violence, turmoil and grief Doug's actions caused to so many individuals. The next portion of this story becomes more gruesome, tragic; one that left a trail of recriminations, denials, and personal grief for families, staff, and inmates. These are the events that cause us to think about our human responsibility.

The Washington Post wrote the following story on September 29, 1991: "The deep quiet of a Sunday morning had enveloped this small western Montana town of miners and millworkers last week when the blare of the prison alarm startled churchgoers leaving the 9:00 a.m. services."⁹

The following is a paraphrase of the story as it continues explaining the riot that took place at the prison outside the town of Deer Lodge. In an uprising, prisoners took control of the maximum-security complex and killed five fellow inmates suspected of being informants, hanging three from a cellblock balcony by electrical cords, according to law enforcement officials.

The five dead were said to be informants because they had given incriminating information about other prisoners or because the nature of their crimes made them vulnerable to attacks.

The inmates involved in the riot in the maximum-security block found weakness in the structural design of the max unit along with architectural flaws. These lapses in the design of the unit allowed the inmates to overpower one of the cell sections and to set fires to melt the impenetrable glass surrounding the control room that electronically control led access to the cell units and cell doors. The officers in the control centers escaped through hatches built into the ceilings and they were able to make their way to the unit's roof.

Once the cells were opened almost all of the 68 inmates participated in the riot. The inmates in the protective custody unit received the brunt of their rage.

One protected inmate managed to make his way into an entranceway, although both of his legs had been broken. Six other inmates were attacked, five were killed and another lived even though his throat had been cut and 27 staples driven into his head.

Three of the five killed were hung from the second-floor walkway. They were also beaten with broken broom handles, fire extinguishers, and stabbed. Two had their throats slashed. Another inmate was thrown over the second floor railing to the concrete floor below.

Hanging is a horrible death. It was reported that one of the inmates that was hung was gasping and fighting for his breath for 10 minutes while the oxygen to his brain was being choked off. One inmate was chanting die, die, die. It is difficult to explain this barbarism, but it is a reality among human beings.

The riot was brought under control by 2:00 p.m. Four inmate bodies were sprawled on the floor of D block, in large pools of blood, as a result from blows from inmates using fire extinguishers and broom handles. They were administering vengeance from a perverted sense of inmate justice. This leads one to think about how human thoughts become so misaligned and destructive.

In our present-day culture, school shootings have victimized vulnerable students, teachers, parents and have altered our perception of safety in our nation's schools. The story of the riot is not a separate story from these atrocities but is one that has the same roots of destruction. It is not new to our societies inability to remedy these horrific incidences. It is my experience that it is indifference to a portion of the justice system that comprises the possible correction of individuals. Crime is popular as entertainment, but, it is neglected until a sensational incident occurs, such as school shootings. Then it reflects on all aspects of society, families, schools, churches, neighborhoods, law enforcement, judicial system, mental health services, laws, and us as individuals.

Citizens divide into different camps on almost every issue. Those who are for preserving the right to own guns and those who want restrictions or complete elimination of the second amendment. These implacable stands appear to be

taking the wrong path to a false destination. The question is: Why do people commit such evil acts? Our current President calls the perpetrators, Sickos. President Trump may in his ill-chosen words have a small inclination of what is the right approach. As we give thought to Douglas Turner's murderous history, we can pick out clues that could lead us in many different pathways. There is a myriad of signs to follow:

1. Family life
2. Childhood abuse of alcohol and drugs.
3. Inadequate treatment for his behaviors, relationships, involvement with peers, insufficient modeling and lack of instruction into life's virtues, and abusive acts perpetuated against him as a child.
4. Ill prepared treatment facilities to address problems of this magnitude.
5. Inability of the courts to make speedy responses to legal decisions.
6. Insufficient design and operation of prison facilities.
7. Prison personnel failure to follow security regulations.

The question is where do we begin? U.S. Congressional leaders need to become citizen leaders. The answer is not partisan support of their political parties' ideology. There are no quick fixes to these tragic events that evolve from one segment of society to another. Hardening of schools gives an adjustment to the problem but is certainly not the solution. Now there are not answers but a strong effort must be made to look at each segment of the process to remedy these tragic issues or we will continue to have to contend with horrific acts occurring throughout our society. The question for our political leaders is-COULD I HAVE DONE SOMETHING EFFECTIVE THAT WILL STOP THE KILLING? We need a more decisive choice instead of talk, talk, talk, and then ending up doing nothing until the next tragedy strikes and then repeating the same political scenario again and again.

It all comes back to the same questions. Why do individuals commit these heinous acts? The same conclusion continues to resonate. Where do we begin? When will we begin to create facilities, experts, and treatments that

will affect these individuals and turn them into healthier, less dangerous humans.

Doug ended his killing rampage. On July 5, 2003 Doug took the life of a chubby, freckle faced kid, with a lopsided grin by hanging himself in his cell in the maximum-security unit at the State Prison. The end of a tragic life that leaves a message to all of us, do something meaningful while there is time to take constructive action.

Should I, could I, have been more aware? Yes. Reflecting on my life, I could have prepared myself better for the Doug Turner's of this world. If only I would have known.

For Whom The Bell Tolls

John Donne

No man is an island entire of itself, every man

is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.

If a clod is washed away by the sea, Europe is the

Less, as well as if as if a promontory were,

As well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were.

Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in

Mankind; and there fore never send to know for whom the bell

tolls; it tolls for thee.

NOTES

1. Douglas Turner | Murderpedia, the encyclopedia of murders.
2. Supreme Court of Montana State of Montana, Plaintiff/Respondent, v. Doug Turner, Defendant/Appellant.
3. 3. Factual Background
4. 4. Factual Background
5. 5. Factual Background
6. 6. Factual Background
7. 7. Factual Background
8. 8. Factual Background
9. In Wake of Deadly Riot in Montana. Prisons Are On Edge, Pages 1 of 4, The Washington Post, Sharon LaFranlere, September 29, 1991