And Suddenly Disaster Strikes

June 13, 2016 By Kate Ferguson

So this afternoon a co-worker stopped by my office to chat for a few minutes about some new energy bar samples I'd left on the countertop in the kitchen for staffers to taste. Then as conversations are wont to do, our talk veered off into another direction. We wound up sharing our thoughts about the murder of at least 50 people in an Orlando nightclub this weekend. The clientele there was predominantly gay.

Our conversation ran the gamut about hatred, stigma and the insidious residue left by acts of terror such as this one. We backtracked through time to revisit the demise of, to date, almost 3,000 people at the World Trade Center on 9/11 then we returned to the present to discuss the realities of being more aware today than ever before of sudden death caused by some unhappy person who, more often than not, was motivated by their dislike of a particular political or ideological viewpoint to the degree that they rationalized their right to take lives as a way to show their displeasure.

My co-worker and I talked about being more cognizant of uncertainty. Would the train we were on coming to a stop in a darkened tunnel start again to bring us safely back into the light? We'd be late for work to be sure, but at least we'd still be alive and well and able to be grateful to reach our destination.

For the people in the nightclub where the shooting took place, the destination was probably just simply a place to have fun, while enjoying an evening with friends or lovers dancing and listening to music. Each time a shooting takes place, or a bomb goes off in a public place, such as this one, and lives are lost in totally unexpected circumstances, I wonder if these acts can trigger post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Can acts of terror, even when we don't personally experience them, leave a mark on our minds so strong that we're thrown into anxiety and depression that can last for months or even years following the event?

I think when incidents occur that aren't frequently repeated, perhaps this may be a time when developing PTSD is very unlikely. But when terrorist acts become so frequent that we find ourselves becoming conditioned to wait for another incident we feel is guaranteed to happen sooner or later, that's when the door leading to PTSD yawns wide. At that point, many of us may wander through that open door, unaware that we've stepped into another world.

As we’re hit with each new incident, headline, news story, investigation and the inevitable tightening up of security measures that results, I think PTSD creeps into our genes. Here, they become a permanent fixture in our DNA. Have you ever found yourself waking up feeling anxious, hopeless and cynical? If so, you may not have to look any further than the times in which we live.

But there are ways of coping with these uncertain times, says the Anxiety and Depression Association of America. The organization advises us to stop focusing so hard on the news, to spend more time doing activities with loved ones or enjoying nature and to avoid numbing ourselves by turning to drinking or taking drugs.

Excuse me if I’m making this seem very simplistic. But this sounds a lot like not worrying about acts of terror and those who commit them and just being yourself and living the life you love.

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